

AN ATHONITE GERONTIKON

Sayings of the Holy Fathers of Mount Athos



By
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Chapter I: On Christ-like Love

The ever memorable Simeon, the hermit of St. Anne's, devoted himself to the service of the sick and elderly. His kalyve¹ which was dedicated to the feast of the Purification, had no water nearby. He toiled constantly, making wooden kitchen utensils to sell in Karyes, where he always went on foot. He died in 1933 at the age of 69.

At one time some monks of New Skete cleaned up the area where the bones of the reposed fathers were kept. An elder by the name of Daniel, who lived in the fort of the skete and served everyone with no complaints, once while helping on the clean-up team addressed the reposed, saying: "You struggled while living on Earth, so you have received your laurels and found your place in Heaven. Pray for us, Holy Fathers."

Then a voice was heard coming from the heap of bones: "You must have love — no one can be saved without having love!

An elder said "We are Christians, but no one keeps the commandment of 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'" There were some monks, brave both in body and spirit, who were consumed by the virtue of love. Nothing could stop them, neither hard work nor the danger of contracting infectious diseases while taking care of their sick brothers. Father Panteleimon from St. Anne's was such a hero. He devoted himself to the service of others. He nursed those afflicted with tuberculosis, fed the starving during the incredible hunger of the German occupation, and finally died in 1948 after having contracted the disease himself — all without uttering any complaints. Instead, he always gave praise to God.

Ignatios from Chios, a monk of St. Anne's, gained distinction not only during our country's wars, especially in the Balkans, but also for his efforts in striving for love and charity. On his arrival at the hermitage he built a hut by the seashore in honor of the Lord's birth. There he offered hospitality to everyone, especially to the shipwrecked. He risked his own life helping many New Zealanders and British soldiers escape. All the fish he caught he would give to the destitute and persecuted. He died when he fell off a cliff in 1947. They found him holding his forehead, with a cross in his mouth.

Another charitable fisherman was Father Sophronios from St. Anne's, who lived in a hut below Loviarika. At first he had gone to the monastery of Lavra, wanting to be tonsured a monk there, but he came back unsuccessful, Satan then attacked him by deriding him and saying sarcastically "You went as Spyros and returned with the same name — Spyros" (that was his secular name). But he refused to despair. He returned to the monastery, was tonsured, and began to live the angelic life. He lived completely destitute, but he had a great deal of love in him. He gave away all the fish he caught to the poor fathers. He reposed when he was ninety years old.

Isaak the Dionysiata, while praying unceasingly forgot to go to sleep, particularly at night. He devoted his prayers to the health and salvation of the workmen in his holy monastery often in tears and anguish in his loving heart. For a while he stayed on the upper floor of the monastery's metochion. The workmen could hear him praying out loud, wailing and saying "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, be merciful to the workmen. Give them their daily bread and bless them, for they are working so hard to get their daughters married off, and to help their children complete their education."

An Elder said:

Sometimes we say we have love, but what kind of love is it? What I mean is, what land of spiritual love, for I am not referring to worldly love. How can any man reach the state of considering all mankind as his brothers and sisters? Perhaps some of these people are heathen or Jehovah Witnesses. Yet, nonetheless, they are brothers in flesh, though not of course in spirit, as the Orthodox are to one another. But they are still blood brothers. We ought to shed our tears for them as well. In another instance, if an Orthodox were to become a Jehovah Witness or a Catholic, how I would weep. Now there are millions like them. Have I wept enough? No, and therefore, I am far from having true love in me.

There once was a hermit, well known to all the caves of the Athonite peninsula, who had a bright and joyful face. He would put out a cup to gather water and would wait twenty-four hours for it to be filled. Such was his patience and perseverance. His wish was to die on the day of the Elevation of the Holy Cross, celebrated on the fourteenth of September; for the fathers say that on that day there is no examination of the souls on the ascent to heaven. He was totally poor. He owned nothing, but his soul was adorned with Christ-like love.

If he knew of someone who was sick somewhere, he would gladly go to look after and serve that person. He was always ready to help, serve, and care for the elderly. He had nursed fifteen elderly and sick hermits. O man of God! You were truly an imitator of the Lord. You became a Zealot and followed Christ's example of washing his disciples' feet.

Elder Gideon from the monastery of Lavra became simple Paul the Second. As he watched an airplane flying over, he was observed praying.

"What are you doing there, Father Gideon?" "Well, I am

praying, using my prayer rope," he would answer in a simple manner, "so that no plane will crash, and all the people travelling will reach their destination unharmed."

The charitable elder Charalambros from New Skete was bedridden with a very serious illness. He was visited by Father K.

"How are you getting along, Father?" asked Elder Charalambros.

"Well, Geronda, with your blessing."

"Do you have food? I have some dried bread," he said, and with some effort he got up, stretched his thin legs as much as he could, and took from the shelf a loaf of the bread. "Take it, my brother and father, and pray for me."

"This action strengthened me," Father K. said later, "and it remained fresh in my memory for the rest of my life. He was wrestling with death, yet the care for his brother took precedence over his own mortal struggles."

An elder said, "We will cry over the ruins of our skete, for love doesn't exist there. So much money Give a bit to a poor person, so that you will be building a little hut in heaven."

Elder Avvakoum was a disciple of love. Once, with much self-denial, he kept in his hut a youth infected with tuberculosis, looking after him for many months. Joyfully he nursed him, caring for him like a loving mother. Even though he himself was fasting, he nourished his patient with meat and other nutritious foods. He struggled hard with the young man's affliction, and the youth finally died in his arms after repenting and confessing his sins. Before the young man's repose, the elder tonsured him a monk, giving him the name Phanourios.

Another time some pilgrims found Father Avvakoum in his hut crying. When they asked him what the matter was, he told them that shortly before their arrival, some visitors had told him about some blind children who were suffering in the world, and he

could not hold back his tears. His was a true affection, unselfish and practical.

Rightfully it has been said about Elder Avvakoum: "One sure thing about this man: he attracted his fellow men toward him like a healing fountain." . . .

Elder N. gave away everything he had. This ever memorable monk had as his motto "God loves the cheerful giver."

A charitable group of five brothers of St. Anne's Skete would fill up the sacks of any fathers who came for the vigils with lemons and oranges picked from their orchard.

And again some other fathers would gather vegetables from their gardens and put them out near the paths of the skete which were most frequently used by monks, pilgrims, and workmen so that all might freely share the fathers' charity, taking whatever was needed.

In faraway paths even to this day, next to several prayer stands, one might find a little bread and olives to be used by any tired traveller. It is a continuation of the Athonite hospitality in Panagia's garden, where the monks see in every visitor Christ himself. This is in accordance with His word: "I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in" and "In as much as you did it to one of the least of these, my brethren, you did it to me" (Matthew 25: 25-40).

St. Agapios the worthy labourer led an ascetic life at Koutloumousiou's skete near the Holy Monastery of Vatopedi. He was captured by the Turks and after twelve years in captivity was freed miraculously by the Lady Theotokos and returned to Mount Athos to his elder. The elder reprimanded him for secretly leaving his captivity. The holy Agapios obeyed him, returned and, by his virtue and holiness, persuaded the Turk and his two sons to come to the Holy Mountain where they were

baptized and became monks.

The words of our contemporary wise Father Athanasios the Iviritan — mellifluous, loving, and filled with the desire for God — are echoing in my deafened ears, awakening my insensitive heart: "Heavenly pleasure and enjoyment beyond this world come the moment any man contemplates the mystery of the divine plan of God's incarnation, for the salvation of mankind through the Virgin Mary Theotokos. Jesus and Mary, Mary and Jesus, these two most wonderful names — that is paradise!"

"The Lord brought me down from the plane of mystical visions to the level of the practice of the virtues," an obedient monk once said. He had been caring for his aged, senile elder who was suffering from prostate infections. The elder had uncontrollable urination, which kept his disciple awake all night long.

Another one said: "Our love should be brotherly love to relatives or strangers alike."

On the treacherous Karoulia lived a Russian ascetic, Father Zosimas, a man of perfect love. He looked after the sick and gave a helping hand anywhere it was needed. During the war he fed many hermits by making baskets and selling them.

Father Gabriel of New Skete said: "Even though a man participates in the Holy Mysteries daily or gives away all his possessions to charity and reduces himself to skin and bones from fasting and doing many prostrations, he will not have God's mercy unless he has God-like love. That is why St. Paul, the great apostle to all the nations, when praising love said: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal" (I Corinthians 13: 1).

One hundred and fifty years had passed since the holy Gerents,

the builder of St. Anne's Skete lived, when a giant of asceticism, the elder Damaskinos, came to spend his ascetic life in a dreary hut on the north side of the skete. He was one of the strongest pillars of the skete in the sixteenth century, and he never consumed anything but dry bread and water. His prayers were of rare warmth, love and sympathy for the entire world, and his love burned like a candle.

He would pray like this: "Lord, make all idolaters unbelievers, atheists and heretics to repent, to learn the truth and to believe in you, to become 'one flock with one shepherd, and to glorify You, the only true God in Trinity-God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit-so that no one will be left out of Heaven, my Lord."

Frequently, he would go into ecstasy and have visions of great mysteries and thus be filled with divine joy and thanks- giving.

The time my ever memorable elder decided to write Memories of Panamas Garden, he was ill and not able to write it himself. But when there was some free time, unforgettable moments for me, he would narrate and I, the least of all, would compile what he said with his blessing.

We wrote about his brother monk Stephanos, who was the last one remaining from their synodia. We corresponded and were received as guests frequently in his hermitage hut.

"We did not have a pack animal to transport our loads," my elder said. "Nonetheless, we had the blessed 'pack carrier of love' whose name was Stephanos. Most of the time while carrying on his back an oversized pack and as he was climbing from the dock up to the hill, he uttered the Jesus Prayer out loud. The fathers at the skete knew that Father Stephanos was coming, for they could hear the well-known sound of his voice: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on us.'

Frequently while conversing with someone, he would repeat out loud in a simple manner the same prayer, regardless of whether

or not he had put the person he was with in an awkward situation.

"Being a Spartan, he had a harsh and awkward manner, forward and solemn—a severe monk, you would say, if you had not known him well. However, he had an unbelievably sensitive heart, full of compassion for the poor. On Mount Athos personalities are straightened out, becoming simpler. Masks of social politeness and pretentious courtesy are removed. These personalities are sanctified in the fountain of spontaneous love that is not found anywhere else in the world.

"I will never forget Father Stephanos' love and self-denial. He would always wear the most inexpensive clothing, and he would do the heaviest jobs and eat the worst food. He would collect the left-over food from the day before, put it in a bowl, add a bit of water, and eat it quietly. Often Elder Paisios would say to him jokingly, 'Hey, old man do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing'" (Matthew 6:3). Stephanos, do you remember the nice meals we enjoyed in America? We ate like kings! And now, you are eating this watered-down food!"

"He would nod agreeably, almost with indifference, emptying the bowl with pleasure as if he were eating a gourmet meal. His hut to him was like a little palace in Heaven, surpassing the skyscrapers of America in comfort and in happiness, and his food was the best in the world.

"When he became ill with cirrhosis of the liver, we visited him in his hermitage. We would find him sleeping on a table. We offered to take him to Thessaloniki for therapy, but he adamantly refused. 'If our Panagia wishes for me to be cured, that is fine. Whatever she likes, and anyway she wants it. But I am not leaving Athos,' he answered. This ever memorable monk was hard on himself yet so kind to his brothers. His enormous pack displayed the struggles of his charitable heart as he

travelled on foot through rocky, desolate places, bringing food and medicine to the destitute hermits. Often enough when he used a mule for transportation, it was during the night so that his virtue might not be known."

"To pray for the world is as if you are shedding blood," St. Silouanos of Mount Athos said. And again, "Our brother is our life."

Elder Avvakoum had the characteristic of spontaneous deep love which is so often found on Mount Athos. He served as an infirmarian in the holy monastery of Lavra. Days, nights, months and years, summer and winter, Elder Avvakoum spent his time over the washtub, washing the clothes gladly and without complaint for the sick brothers and for many lay people in need. He went back and forth from the washtub to the kitchen, preparing meals, feeding the sick, and providing them with fresh clothes so that they would always be clean.

I was privileged to meet and know Elder Modestos, a member of the monastic community of Konstamonitou, a tireless scholar of divine love. All his discussions were centred on love, the axis of spiritual life. Frequently he would say: "Unless we feel that all mankind are our brothers and sisters, and that we are their brothers and sisters as well, the Holy Spirit will never dwell in our hearts. The Lord loves everyone the same, the biggest sinner and the most holy man. In the same way we should embrace everyone in our hearts. Love tolerates, gives in, and endures. 'God is love'."

An elder said: "Anyone who loves God loves not only his fellow man, but the entire creation as well: trees, grass, flowers. He loves everything with the same love."

The brothers of New Skete have told me that the elder Neophytos, from the time he became a monk to the time he died

in peace, remained in Panagia's garden for sixty-five years without ever leaving, even once. This ever memorable monk practiced love towards everyone as a virtue higher even than the virtues of solitude and renunciation of the world. Because of this, he loaded himself with the pilgrims' luggage, carrying it from the dock to the main part of the monastery

Chapter II: On Purity of the Senses and the Heart

An elderly ascetic told us: "Any monastic who ventures out into the world should be extremely careful when conversing with people. This is particularly true of female monks who need experienced spiritual fathers to tell them how to maintain the purity of their senses."

Father Neophytos was the spiritual father of Little St. Anne's. He occupied the hermitage of the Holy Archangels, the place where St. Agapios had lived and written *The Salvation of Sinners*. At one-time Father Neophytos had gone to the Island of Tinos in order to serve as the celebrant priest in one of the women's monasteries there. In this community all the nuns were attempting to live a pure life. One of them, who was blind, went to confession to Father Neophytos and revealed the impure thoughts which she had had about him. He was so dismayed that he immediately returned to Little St. Anne's.

He was sad and puzzled: how could Satan introduce such thoughts to a blind person? He decided one day to invite answers from all the neighbouring spiritual fathers. He discussed the question with Fathers Stephanos, Kyprianos, and Kosmas, and with a subordinate sent by Father Ignatios who, although the most experienced of them all, happened to be ill at the time. His

subordinate's name was Ignatios also. He was from Ismirne and had had the desire to be a monk from a very early age.

All the elders started to discuss this issue: how could a blind nun be tempted by improper thoughts? But though they were spiritually mature, they were unable to resolve the question. Then the turn of the young Father Ignatios came. "Your voice, Father, became the cause of such thoughts to the blind nun, thoughts which she reflected upon and then went to confess." All the fathers were impressed with his answer and blessed his words.

An elder said: "Monk, beware! Do not extend your hand to any woman, not even your own mother, so that you can attain the spiritual heights of our forefathers. Pay attention when you are in the world. Restrain from laughing and joking, so that while conversing, your teeth may not be seen. When you observe all of these practices, the purity of your life will teach you higher things."

In 1955 a miracle occurred to a brother from Dionysiou: the appearance of St. John the Baptist to him. We were told of the occurrence by the ever memorable Elder Lazaros. He was talking as if it were of a third person, but we realized that it was really about him.

A brother from the monastery who was sent to Thessaloniki stayed in a hotel where he was unwillingly tempted. A pretty young woman approached him, a family acquaintance, asking him questions about the fathers and the Holy Mountain. The discussion went on for a long time and her intention became clear when she offered him hospitality in her room, extending her hand to him saying: 'We'll be going just for a moment, and will return right away.'

"His fall would have been actualized if at that moment he had not been protected by his prayer to and trust in St. John the Baptist. He pleaded for the saint to intercede and save him from such a pitfall. And indeed a sudden blinding light shone in her room and in the midst of it appeared St. John, who snatched him up and returned him to his room at the opposite end of the hotel floor."

An elder said: "A good man views all women as if they were his own sisters. Even when he sees an immoral woman, he should say to himself: 'If this woman were my blood sister, I would be very embarrassed.' Then he would not have taken advantage of her."

The enlightened Father Loakim from St. Anne's, who was like a brother to our elder, said: "Whoever desires to be pure, let him be careful, strict, and watchful of himself, not even holding his own hands together. In gatherings he should be careful about how he talks and looks around, and avoid contact with handsome people and anything else which might connect him to a fall from chastity and purity of life." For our contemporary Father Joseph, the Hesychast, relentless was the war against the flesh. This war lasted eight years, which is a long time for someone who had remained pure of any carnal sins since childhood. He would say that whenever he was reaching the point of exhaustion in the struggle, he would start all over again, after being strengthened by God's grace. But for him, as time passed, the war was intensified almost endlessly. 'At the same time, I did not give up my defence tactics, which were all-night vigils and self-inflicted beatings. I wept, sighed and prayed to our Lady Theotokos. The struggle slowed down for a while so that I could catch my breath, and then it started all over again, more intensely than before. My body got weaker and I lost my

strength. I was consoled only in prayer, and that was a comforting sign."

He mobilized all practical methods for a victorious ending of the struggle, such as all-night vigils, hardship, hunger, thirst, beatings, and tears. He gave up his bed and slept sitting on a wooden stool made into an armchair to rest his arms. He did this for the duration of the entire war.



On Women Temperament: Jealously and Self-love

Our contemporary venerable elder Paisios once said to a group of women monastics:

When one keeps himself away from futile things, his thoughts automatically turn to God. It has been easier for women to try to please God, because of their sensitive hearts, than it has been for men, who are rational thinkers. Led by their feelings, women proceeded to Golgotha and to the Holy Sepulchre, while the men hid themselves away.

But women can be in danger of wasting their emotions on small, vain things.

It is easy to give your heart to small vanities, such that there is nothing left over for Christ. You can easily not be satisfied with the simple necessities, and desire instead those things which are beautiful, ornate, and pleasant. You would thus prefer a little flower to be painted on a glass, a tablecloth embroidered, chairs to be carved, and so forth. In this way the heart is dispersed. Do not waste your heart foolishly. Women in their practical daily lives love such fine detail, just as they do in their spiritual lives also; but wasting their energies on the fine details in the

practical realm allows Satan to do his own meticulous destructive work. Do not attach yourselves to ephemeral things, but only to God. Do not become lost in the sea of detail; rather, simplify your spiritual struggle first, and do not despair. After your large passions are cut off, the small ones will disappear also. Do not dwell on your past life and your childhood transgressions, for new opportunities are available for all. Always give praise and thanks to God; ingratitude is the worse sin of all, and the worse sinner is an ungrateful one.

Father Paisios also said: "Women are full of love. But Satan can poison that love and turn it to envy. Woman can love themselves excessively; such love creates suffering, and it becomes a torment. Without such self-love, one turns to Christ and thus can love everyone."

And he said: "A jealous man avoids the person he envies. A jealous woman cannot rest until her adversary is totally wiped out."

Father Paisios also said that "Underneath human adversity, God's harmony is hidden. For example, in a marriage two totally different personalities can experience harmony. Thus women with their emotional wealth can bring men nearer to God."

On Simplicity

There was an ascetic in Karoulia, the Holy Mountain's most austere desert, who had a little kitten to comfort him and to protect him from snakes and mice. One day a vulture was flying over and from the solitary sky spotted its prey, dived down, and snatched the kitten up in its claws.

The ascetic was upset and, not knowing what to do, immediately entered his chapel to lodge a complaint to the hermitage's saintly protector. He went up to the oil lamp hanging before the protector's icon and blew out the flame to emphasize the point he was going to make. He had always considered this saint his friend, so he told him about the sad incident and demanded his help. "Why, my saint, did you not protect the kitten?" he complained.

At that very moment he heard the kitten crying outside the door. It had been freed from the attacker's talons.

An elder once told me a similar story about a monk who had gone to Karyes for some errand and had left the door of his cell open, trusting in the protection of St. Nicholas, its patron. When he returned he found that thieves had stripped the cell of everything. He then went to the church and with courage and in a friendly tone of voice said to St. Nicholas, "Why did you not protect the cell from robbers, my saint? Starting today unless you reveal the robbers, I will not light your lampada." And he did just as he had threatened.

A few days later the thieves were caught, an evidence of the elder's faith, confidence, and simplicity, as well as of St. Nicholas' real presence there. In fact, the robbers humbled

themselves and repented, and returned everything they had taken to the elder.

A very simple monk named Ermolaos lived in Great Lavra where his obedience was to herd the monastery's rams. He wore tattered clothes and carried his prayer rope in his hand always. He was completely guileless, with a primitive, innocent soul which was filled with divine grace. It is said that he once saw Panagia in Lavra walking around. He did not realize who she was and said, "What is a woman doing in Lavra?" One of the workmen was abusive to Ermolaos: he would swear at him and put him out in the snow, but the simple one endured all of it calmly and with kindness. It was the hermit Damaskinos from St. Basil's desert who told us many things about this Ermolaos

A simple, child-like elder told me: "Monks in the past were simple men, guileless and with no evil; they were God's lit- the lambs."

Although he is now bedridden, the simple elder Methodios still lives in St. Neilos' cell. This is his prayer: "Lord, on the day you take this poor one, place him among your servants. I do not expect to be among either bishops or priests, but just to get a spot in a corner."

An elder said,

Prayer does not tire one but gives rest, the way a child feels in his mother's arms. If one were to observe some monks praying, he might think that they are like children. Indeed, seeing them

making all kinds of motions, he might even think they had gone crazy. Some of them are like the little child who runs to his father, pulling his coat, and saying 'I don't know how, but you must do this for me . . . '

From a certain perspective, such people as I am talking about could be seen as 'useless.' Why? Because they cannot work: their bodies become as if paralyzed, and their bones are stiffened like candles. They are unable to move. When God's love falls upon a person in abundance, it dissolves him.

An elder said,

A natural simplicity becomes sanctification in a natural way. A simple but holy man, when he once had to take care of a poor sick person, went down to the seashore to the church of the Ascension and lifted up his arms and prayed: 'My Holy Ascension, give me a little fish for my sick charge.' And what a miracle — a fish came into his hands! He cooked it and thanked God and the Holy Ascension.

A simple holy man, lacking a certain sharpness of mind, might see a misled person as holy. A clever holy man, however, uses discernment to know if someone is misled. Having intelligence is a gift from God like bodily strength. We must use whatever gifts God gives us, for sanctification and salvation.

Those whom we see as being deprived (orphans, the crippled, the dull-witted, and so forth) — God helps them and graces them with gifts. God is just.

In Karyes, Father Kyrillos had a monk in obedience, Hieromonk Pavlos, who celebrated the liturgy with great reverence. In particular, he would not reprimand anyone

for his mistakes during the services. If he had to correct someone, he would do it by motioning to him very discreetly.

The hermit father Philaretos from Karoulia was taken to Thessaloniki to appear in court, where he was unjustly accused of taking an ancient book which had been stolen by a tourist. He had no money to pay the fine.

"Either you pay, Father, or you go to jail," the judge said to him. "I prefer to go to prison. I have no money. Besides this way, I will remember the eternal prison," he replied. When finally, some of the faithful paid the fine, he said: "I have been freed from the earthly prison. I wonder if I will be set free from the eternal one?"

Some asked him, "How was it in Thessaloniki, Elder Philaretos, how were the people?" He had not been there for fifty years, and he replied, "What can I say, Fathers? They were all rushing about for their salvation. I am the only negligent and lazy one."

At one time Elder Artemios, very simple of soul and manners, was in Piraeus harbour for some business of the monastery. He was approached and invited by a prostitute to her house and he, being naive, accepted. "Praise be to God," he said, "that among this multitude of people a person was found to extend me hospitality."

The woman showed him to a room, gave him some food, and left. He began to pray using his prayer rope. Shortly after, the woman knocked at the door. But Artemios expected to hear "Through the prayers" along with the knock, as is done on the Holy Mountain.

Since she continued to knock, he cried out "Say 'Through the

prayers'. . . Say it, or I am not going to open."
Because she did not say it, he figured it must be a demonic spirit
at the door and kept on praying.

I was once acquainted with two monks whose faces were a true
picture of simplicity and forbearance. They had simple,
unaffected souls with no evil or hypocrisy in them. They were
lambs of Christ, meek and humble like Him. They were Elder A.
from St. Anne's Skete and Elder P. from New Skete. They have
since departed to the Lord.

In the recent past, in the Holy Mountain's capital of Karyes, had
lived a very simple non-monastic, old man Giannis. He was
called "the ancient" because he was always dressed in a very
old-fashioned way and held in his right hand a shepherd's staff.
One day he went to the Josaphite fathers and said to Father B., "I
would like you to make me a little icon of Panagia in a cloud
and in white." That was the way he had seen her in a vision.
"We will make you one, old man Giannis, but it will cost you a
lot," the monk said.
"You ask for a lot, but I will give you a little bit," the old man
replied.

Another time he saw a wolf roaming around near Father
Agathangelos' house. Giannis crossed himself and said, "My
Panagia, save me from the wolf and I will bring you a container
of oil."

And indeed the next morning he brought oil to the icon of Axion
Esti.

In one of Xeropotamou's cells lived another simple but meek monk, elderly Antonios Tskoukas. A brother who was passing by one time met him and asked: "What are you doing, old man?" "What else can I do but wait for Pascha?" "Pascha? It has past! We are now in Pentecost." "Pentecost? When did it pass? I am still fasting. I haven't broken my fast yet," the elderly man said wondering, and with an unusually simple manner. He was spending most of his time in Diako-Firfirin. He did not like it when any of the visitors were smoking in the courtyard of the Protaton. He would murmur, "Anyone who smokes is ungrateful. The Church does not need cigarettes. It needs incense, matches, and candles."



On Expatriation and Voluntary Exile

Two descendants of royalty were John and his son Euthymios, the builder of the Holy Monastery of Iviron. They flourished from 960 to 980 A.D. and were students of St. Athanasios the Athonite.

Holy Euthymios, while still living in the world, had quarreled with and killed a Jew who had blasphemed the Lord Jesus' name. After that he fell gravely ill but was cured by the Theotokos. Then he went to Mount Athos to be under obedience to the great cenobitic Athonite Athanasios. The monks of Iviron called Euthymios the new Chrysostom, for he translated the entire Bible and other books from Greek into the Iberian language.

St. Savvas the Serbian was a crown prince. His name before he was a professed monk was Rastko, and his father was Stephanos

Nemania, King of Serbia. His whole family were very pious. Since childhood this saint loved the angelic monastic life. When some monks from Mount Athos visited his country, among them was a very pious Russian elder. After he heard from him about the holy monastic life on the Mount Athos, the prince was struck by divine love. With tears of piety he asked the elder to take him along with them on their way back to the Holy Mountain.

"I see, Father, that God, Who knows the depths of my heart, sent you to me, a sinner, to guide me to the divine path. So I beg you, teach me how to avoid the vanity of the world and to succeed in a holy life like yours. For soon my parents are planning to marry me off. That is why I have decided to depart from here as soon as possible."

The elder accepted him as a travelling companion and guide, for he realized that it was God's will, since he saw Rastko's soul burning with desire for God while preparing for his escape. In the Russian monastery Rastko trained in all monastic labours like a good soldier and athlete. His parents, however, were inconsolable. His father sent men everywhere to look for him, for Rastko was not only his well-behaved, beautiful son, but also his heir to the throne.

Finally three Serbian noblemen heard that Rastko was staying in the Russian monastery and went there to bring him back. Novice Rastko pleaded with his elders to tonsure him immediately and that night hid himself in the monastery's tower.

Then he wrote a letter to his parents describing the last judgment and eternal hell. The letter touched them so deeply that they decided to become monastics themselves. His mother received the schema in a monastery where she laboured, pleasing God, and there she reposed in the Lord. His father gave up his kingdom and passed the throne to his other son, Stephanos. Then he went to Mount Athos where he met with his son Savvas. The joy and piety they felt when they met cannot be described. The former king requested to be tonsured a monk and

received the name of Simeon. Thus the natural father became the spiritual son of his own natural son. In 1198 the father and son built the famous Serbian monastery of Chilandari on land donated to them by the holy monastery of Vatopedi, a grant under the golden seal of the Emperor Alexios III. There in Chilandari both the father and the son were later canonized.

The holy Damianos was indeed worthy of admiration. A friend of St. Kosmas the Zographitan, he led a pure life, labouring in the holy monastery of Esphigmenou. He was under the rule never to stay overnight anywhere else but in his own hut. Once, he found himself at night near Chilandari, in rain and fog, and not knowing where he was because of the dark and the heavy rain, he cried out to the Lord. "Lord Jesus Christ, save me, for I am perishing." Then an angel of God appeared and snatched him up, and suddenly he found himself safely in front of his own hut. After he reposed in the Lord, the fathers of the monastery smelled a fragrance coming from his tomb for forty days; this fragrance reached the holy monastery even though it was a mile away from the tomb.

"Where do you come from, Elder?" They would ask spiritual father Benjamin from the monastery of Koutloumousiou, who lived to be ninety-five and departed] to the Lord in 1941 "I am a refugee," he would reply, meaning that all human beings are exiles, and this life is passing and temporary.

About the year 1835, approximately five years after the Turkish

occupation had ended, a group of serdarides went to a heavily wooded area near Great Lavra to hunt for wild goats. Suddenly one morning they saw a venerable elder outside a cave standing there naked, and they said to him: "Elder, bless!"

"The Lord," he replied, and started asking them questions about the Holy Mountain: "How is it? How do the monks spend their time?" And so forth. They informed him that it was peaceful everywhere, now that the Turkish occupation had ended.

"Who are these Turks? And what is the Greek Revolution?" the elderly hermit asked.

"Don't you know, Elder, that we the Orthodox shed our blood to be free from the Turks?"

"No, my children, I do not know anything. Here we are seven altogether, but we do not go anywhere. We do not get any news," replied this earthly angel and heavenly man.

After these hunters had been blessed by him, they hurried in amazement to tell the fathers of St. Anne's Skete all about their encounter. The fathers of the skete showed great interest in what the hunters told them. Accompanied by these civil guards, some of the fathers went throughout all Mount Athos searching for the cave and the extraordinary elder, neither of which they found.

In the kellion of Holy Trinity in Karyes lived Father Kyrillos, a man of sweet, friendly and gentle face. He was very old and had a white beard and shining countenance. Because of his appearance, one might have supposed him the principal of some university, but in actuality throughout his whole life he had never left Athos.

Hieromonk Loakim the American, who was admirable for his

self-inflicted exile and his contempt for all worldly glory, lived in a hut belonging to St. Anne's and named for the Birth of the Theotokos. He was my elder's spiritual brother. My elder told us repeatedly about this exceptional man and his exemplary obedience.

He had served at the Jerusalem Patriarchate and in the American army. He was decorated with several medals which, along with his Archimandrite's cross, he devoted to St. Anne's icon.

Coming to Mount Athos from America, where he had been a candidate for high ecclesiastical office, he did exemplary obedience under a very strict elder, after first resigning voluntarily from his priesthood so that he might live as a simple monk. Like the ancient ascetics, he grew a long beard which reached the ground. Afflicted with tuberculosis, he reposed in the Lord in 1957.

The hesychast Gregorios lived in total exile in the Archangel hut at Small St. Anne's. He was a Spartan, and he devoted his whole life to constant fasting and prayer. He used to say that he would be cast into hell with Satan because he felt that he did not honour enough the Lord's sacrifice on the cross. Everybody loved him.

An aged elder said, "How can one tell that a monk has been crucified? Here is Father S. He has been on Mount Athos for sixty years and has not come out in the world." Then he said again, "Praise and flattery are harmful to a monk. A monk who seeks praise is like a man who tries to catch his shadow." And then again he said, "A monk under obedience might say, 'When my elder scolds me he does not love me.' But if he only knew that he is in his elder's heart!"

A Serbian monk from Chilandari did not leave his cell for forty years.

St. Leontios from Dionysiou did not know where the exit door of the monastery was for seventy-five years, until he departed eternally to the Lord.

One hundred years ago there lived and reposed in peace in a barren hut of St. Anne's Skete a Serbian prince of the family of Vragovich, called Monk Theokletos. As an ascetic he laboured hard in exile. For this reason he was blessed with the grace of the all-giving and merciful God.

An elder said, "A monk, as soon as he leaves this world, places his own family under God's care and forgets them. God then has to take care of them. The monk leaves the small family and becomes a member of Adam's larger family. He does not remember or pray for his own family especially, because he knows that God is obligated to look after them. "I see my parents, brothers, sisters, nieces and nephews in every man. I thus don't communicate with my own family. When I do not think of my own, the Lord will."

Hieromonk Euthymios earned a good reputation as a spiritual guide, a discerning father confessor, and a scholar of many

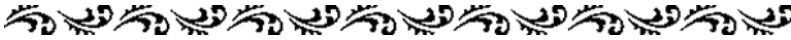
patristic books. He lived in a cell of Koutloumousiou. This ever memorable monk used to tell the following incident:
After the liberation of Crete in 1912, the Turks were selling properties on the island which they had owned during their occupation. At that time, someone who had a brother on Mount Athos went to the skete to ask for some money to buy a property too. His monk brother did not want to give him any money, since he knew that money coming from a monastic does not bring good to relatives. A monk is dedicated to God alone. But finally he was persuaded by his natural brother to give him some money he had. As soon as his brother returned to Thessaloniki, he fell into grave danger. He was robbed of all the money he had received, and killed.

Elder Bartholomew was born in 1860 on Mount Athos, where his mother and other women and children had taken refuge during the rebellion of Chalkidiki. His mother dedicated him to Panagia. Another one to follow in his footsteps was Hierodeacon Vasilios (Davilas) who died in 1979: he demonstrated such complete denial of the world that he never left Mount Athos or his cell for forty years, not even to go to Karyes.

In the same way the natural brothers Benedictos, Agathangelos, and Savvas (all three from the cell of the Dormition) and their brother Hieromonk Gregorios of St. Nicholas cell in Karyes, never went back to the world from the time of their tonsure. Hieromonk Gregorios, in fact, came to Mount Athos when he was only nine years old. He had forgotten what a woman's face looks like, having only the vaguest memory of his own mother.

Father Neophytos of St. Anne's, an aged elder who once went out of Mount Athos just for a short time on urgent business,

used to tell me: "I pray that Panagia will never allow me to go



out into the world again."

On Ascesis

Our pious God-bearing father Peter the Athonite, the first hesychast on Mount Athos, lived in a cave in the southern part of the peninsula. There he led a truly angelic, heavenly existence. Without clothes, barefoot, and suffering many varied temptations launched against him by Satan, he for fifty-three years was fed only with heavenly bread.

Righteous Gerontios, the founder of St. Anne's Skete, was the first hegumen to serve in the monastery of Vouleftirion. At first he lived in caves near the sea. Later, because of the threat of pirate attacks, he moved higher up the rugged cliffs of Athos, where to this day there is a chapel in honour of St. Panteleimon. Many ascetics lived in desolate huts near him.

With absolutely no possessions and free of worldly cares, they gave themselves entirely to the labour of prayer.

In order to bring some consolation to his brothers, the saintly Gerontios prayed, and holy water appeared on the spot where he did his ascetic labours. His successor gathered up all the water from this miraculous spring, because he wanted a small garden and he needed the water for it. According to the fathers, our Panagia did not like this and dried up the spring, although another one appeared at another spot below the original one. The Lady Theotokos wanted ascetics to be free of worldly affairs, to devote themselves only to prayer, and not to cultivate gardens

The newly manifested St. Gerasimos, who laboured on Athos, stayed in Kapsala for five years as an ascetic. He ate only boiled zucchini with no oil. Then he went to Homala of Kefallinia Island to his ascetic cell and there built a holy monastery. During the time he lived on Mt. Athos, he gained many spiritual experiences, met pious and saintly men, and completed his monastic training. He became a vessel of grace through ceaseless prayer and fasting. That is why all evil spirits were afraid of him and were cast out by him. His nickname was "Kapsalis," after the desolate place of Kapsala. The demons would cry out: "Kapsalis, you have burned us."

During one very cold winter in which snow fell heavily, our righteous and God-inspired father Akakios the Kafsokalyvitan lit a fire to warm himself. But as he drew nearer the fire, he felt colder. Then he realised that it was abnormal to feel cold by the fire, and that the cold must be caused by demonic influence. So he put out the fire, went out of his cave and, naked, fell into the snow, whereupon he immediately felt very warm, as if he were in a steam bath. We were amazed and surprised each time we visited this saint's cave and saw his bed, which is preserved to this very day. It was made of thick, untrimmed branches nailed in such a way that wide spaces remained between them. It would have been impossible for anyone to rest well on them.

St. Savvas the Agioritan, an ascetic who was sanctified on the island of Kalymnos, loved asceticism and suffering. He ate food cooked in oil only on weekends. He did the ninth hour prayer every day. When he slept, he slept on a plank, but most nights he spent entirely in prayer. He confessed God's people like a

good shepherd who "gives his life for his sheep" (John 10:1 1).
He was also clairvoyant.

He left Mount Athos for Aegina, in order to place himself under obedience to St. Nectarios, the miracle worker. St. Nectarios gave him a set of priest's vestments which he wore only on great feasts. It was St. Savvas who served the burial of St. Nectarios.

My elder's spiritual father was the Karouliatan hermit and hieromonk Christophoros. He lived ascetically in a hut which resembled an eagle's nest. It had a tin roof and was surrounded by steep, bare rocks, disappearing into the abyss of the Aegean. There was an endless, cleansing stillness everywhere, interrupted only by the sweet, joyful cries of wild birds. It was a totally isolated place. Only a few cactus fig bushes and some wild almond trees scattered about decorated with a bit of greenery the barren landscape. In these desolate surroundings, one could admire and contemplate how this crippled spiritual father Christophoros came to live near such precipitous and unapproachable ravines. Despite his having only one leg, he would climb, like an athletic mountaineer, up the truly awesome and forbidding Karoulia.

My ever memorable elder many times told me that the fathers in past times used to travel by sea from both the desolate places and from the monasteries, rowing all the way to Daphni and back. Because this way took a long time, they brought books and incense along with them in order to be able to chant their matins. They chanted or prayed with the prayer ropes as they rowed.

In the desert of St. Basil, next to Kerasia, lived Elder Theophylaktos, a solid gem of asceticism and endurance. He had two monks under obedience to him. He frequently went for all-night vigils to a cave. One night after a heavy snowfall, everything was covered by a foot of snow. When morning came, his monks went looking for him everywhere. After a long search they saw from a distance a dark object on a cliff. As they came closer, they realised it was their elder, and they feared that he had frozen to death. As soon as they touched him, however, he moved. This was a great surprise, and they observed that not only was he alive but, in fact, he was emitting such a warmth that it was as if his whole body were aflame. And indeed all the snow had melted around him.

This same holy ascetic at another time was taken by demons and carried over to St. Basil's desert in Karoulia.

An elder said:

"These days we try to become righteous with very little effort. We have abandoned tradition. We do not look up to those at the top, and how they came first in the race. We see only those who came last. "

The marvellous hesychast Varnavas had neither a room of his own nor any possessions. He used one corner of the reception room to rest. Hermit elder Damaskinos told me all about him.

We have been greatly attracted to Dionysiou because of its ascetic, monastic, liturgical and pioneer Athonite tradition. We feel this bond not only because of its wise and revered Abbot Gabriel and the elder Theokletos Dionysiates, who is known for his many scholarly writings, but above all because of the presence of the most pious elder Lazaros. Each time we visited Elder Lazaros at his cell for spiritual assistance, we would leave there full of spiritual fruit, as if we had gathered the mystical grapes of monastic experience. The holy hegumen Gabriel gave us some brief biographical information reflecting the life and experience of this great ascetic and cenobiac:

Father Lazaros came from Melivia of Agia Larisa. He was born in 1892, came to Athos in 1916, and died on December 28, 1974. He was the monastery's Infirmarian for thirty years and served as the typikaris [the monk in charge of making sure the order of services is followed correctly] for ten years and as a proistamenos [the monk who supervises the practical running of the monastery's routines] for thirty years. Before beginning the monastic life, he had received a high school education and had served as secretary to the Justice of the Peace in Dotion-Agias-Larisis. At the age of twenty he immigrated to the U.S.A. Then he came to Mount Athos when he was twenty-four, and was tonsured a monk in 1917.

He was pious and honest in the extreme, a zealot for cenobitic monastic life. Very ascetic, he would receive communion every week with the monastery's blessings. He lived in Niphon's hut for three years, higher up from the monastery, where he observed a strict fast and self-restraint. Proof of all this was that in the period of Great Lent for all the years until 1965, he fasted totally on Mondays and Tuesdays, and on Wednesdays until he had received communion at the Pre-Sanctified Liturgy. After partaking with the fathers of the supper which followed this liturgy, he would then eat nothing else until the following

Saturday.

When serving in the hospital, he took care not only of the body, but also of the soul, preparing those who were about to depart to the Lord.

He had a stroke on Christmas day and lived for three days following that. He received Holy Unction and communicated every day until he lapsed into a coma. Soon afterwards, in the afternoon, he reposed in the Lord. Everyone in the brotherhood mourned him, and to this day his memory has remained vivid among them.

St. Nikodemos the Agioritan was great in the Kingdom of God because he not only taught but also practiced asceticism, fasting, deprivation, and blessed poverty—all of which constitute the beauty of monastic life. Here is what his biographer tells us about him: "His love for hesychia brought him to the wilderness where he bought the kalyve across from St. Basil's desert. He would get his bread from us and then spend the rest of his time in hesychia. Other foods he ate were boiled rice, water with honey, and most of the time he would also eat olives and fava beans."

There is now a half-ruined hut in Koutloumousiou's skete dedicated to St. Loannikios. Here lived a group of six fathers under a very strict geronda. The hut had only two rooms and a small church. None of the fathers had a room of his own. They all rested during the night by leaning on the upright benches in the church. Such was their deprivation and victory over sleep, these athletes of asceticism.

Elder A. the Kafsokalyvitan is still living. We met him many times. In the past the fathers did not use animals to transport their loads. Everything was carried on their backs, even up the steepest paths to the sketes. One-night Elder A., with Panagia's help, carried on his back from the docks to their living quarters a ton of grapes. He struggled with the many loads until morning. Another time he carried five hundred containers of sand for building. Forty-two times he climbed to Athos' peak, either to help with the building of the Transfiguration church at the peak or to take part in the vigil which takes place there each Aug, 6th.

The ever memorable Lavriotan father A. celebrated a liturgy daily for seventy years. His knees had callouses from many prostrations. He foresaw his own death, although he was never ill, even to the end. He blessed the trapeza for the last time, said goodbye to the fathers and brothers, and reposed in the Lord.

What can we say about the hermit Chrysogonos, especially regarding his fasting and his passion-eliminating asceticism? This blessed man, who lived in a hut for workers near the Koutloumousian cell of the Holy Apostles, had for his daily food only bread or toast dipped in water with a bit of sugar. His clothes were old and for bedding he used burlap sacks. He wore five or six of these sacks and thus went through the whole winter next to the fireplace. He was a simple, quiet monk. A similar impoverished monk was another ascetic in Vigla whose name is not known. He lived like "the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet the heavenly Father feeds them" (Matthew 6:26). He lived in great deprivation in a small hut without a chapel. During the evening

services, he would go around to different fathers, carrying his lit oil lamp. Only when he had no more oil would he go to the Romanian skete belonging to Great Lavra. As soon as the fathers there saw his empty lamp, without his having to say anything they would understand and fill it with oil and give him alms. After the Divine Liturgy, bashfully he would eat a very small amount and then depart quickly in prayer. In his hut he lived like an angel.

Once only, when I was with my ever memorable elder, I saw Father Avimelech, whose meek and quiet countenance remains still vivid in my memory. He lived to be over one hundred years old and was a contemporary of St. Nectarios and a co-ascetic with Elder Joseph the Cave-dweller. His hermitage was in the desert of St. Basil above Katounakia, in Small St. Anne's, in a cave which now is used as a cooler room. He would ask that no one be named after him, since he did not honour himself. For his spiritual benefit, he visited several monasteries in Constantinople, Pontos, Jerusalem, and mainland Greece. If anyone asked, "What are you doing, Father?" he would reply, "We are watchful," meaning that he was in constant vigilance and prayer.

The life of Monk John from the Church of the Archangel at Edessa was equal to the ancient athletes of asceticism. He lived his holy life forcefully wearing chains beneath his clothes to create hardship. He avoided contact with people, staying in his small living quarters most of the time, in peace and voluntary poverty. He offered his guests a very tasty rye bread as if it were the best cake. He also gave them cold rain water which he had gathered

in his reservoir. He did not eat fresh tomatoes or fresh figs and other garden vegetables for over three years, because he would not leave his home to go to Lavra or to St. Anne's Skete. And he would never ask for anything from his neighbours. Over a period of fifteen years, when he had to go to Karyes to buy rye or other necessary supplies, he would not stay and be a burden to any of the brothers. He would spend the night outdoors.

The ex-bandit Nikitas from St. Basil's, who was like the grateful robber crucified with Christ, used to say: "Praise and thanks be to God and Panagia who never abandoned me." He had been tonsured by the famous spiritual father Chariton.

"How do you manage with no money, since you are not making any crafts?" the ever memorable loakim used to ask him.

"Praise and thanks be to God! I go to the monastery and ask for a pita bread. When I come back to the hut I find two or three more there!" he would reply in an amazingly candid manner, for which reason he was graced miraculously.

When he fell sick and was bedridden his neighbours — the hermit Damaskenos and his accompanying monks — took care of him. Near his end he was infested with lice. No sooner was he cleaned by the fathers than he would be covered again from head to toe with them.

"I was a bandit while in the world," he would frequently say, "and I have asked God to let me pay Him back for all the things I did. Let lice eat me alive!"

We were blessed to meet the ever memorable hermit Gabriel from Karoulia, a tough fighter and a victorious athlete of self-restraint. Frequently we came across him at St. Anne's kyriakon

or on the way there. He was always either silent or in prayer, saying little. To people who did not know him very well, he appeared to be repulsive and removed from the world. But he was removed in a spiritual sense only.

Toward the end of his life, we visited him for the last time at his hermitage on formidable Karoulia. There we saw Christ's prize winner who, insistently and despite his pain, refused to eat anything cooked in oil. He found a way to make tasteless even the oilless food brought to him by the Danielite fathers.

He was old when he came to Mount Athos, having been a policeman in his former civilian life. He lived with his elder for twenty years, and they never ate oil — even on the feast day of Pascha. He communicated the Holy Mysteries frequently, always with compunction and tears. He kept his shroud bundled up and ready, placed it on a shelf, and labelled it "my shroud."

During the twenty days prior to his death, the Danielites cared for him with true love and brotherly sacrifice. They begged him to eat some food cooked in oil, but in spite of the fact that he was dying and had lost most of his strength, he did not break his fasting rule. He tasted no food with oil, and passed away in peace.

Just before the end he asked for communion. He was peaceful and full of joy. When he was left alone for a few minutes, he lifted his head up to heaven and cried out, "There are flowers! Many flowers! How beautiful is paradise! Is the soul worthy of so many beautiful things of such pleasure?"

O what patience had the wonderful St. Simeon, who went barefoot and had only one tunic to wear. He did his ascetic labours first near the holy monastery of Philotheou and after that went to Pilon, where he built the Phlamouriou monastery. He was made of either stone or steel! He was the most patient,

possession less, but rich-in-virtues servant of God, this Simeon. Indeed, he was stronger than a diamond in spirituality, in patience, and in ascesis. That is why he managed to go barefoot, and wearing the same tunic in winter or summer, until the day he reposed in peace.

Hermit Philaretos of Karoulia wore no shoes. His feet were hardened and his soles looked like a turtle's shell. On the cliffs he planted wherever he could find some soil. He raised potatoes, greens, cabbage and lettuce. These vegetables were his food and he gave some away as alms to other brothers and fathers. His wooden bed was always made, for he slept mostly on the floor, as was verified after his death. A piece of wood was found under his bed which he used as a pillow during his short periods of sleep.

He had been a lieutenant in the army. Leaving behind all worldly glory honour, and vanity, he slept on the floor in Karoulia for twenty years. Known not only for his kindness but also for his poverty and ascesis, he wore the same cassock from the time of his tonsure as a monk to the time he slept in the Lord. This garment was patched so many times that its original cloth no longer existed.

Elder Eulogios died in 1948. He was from the cell of St. George the Miracle Worker, the cell called Phaneromenou. When still young, Father Eulogios fasted without oil for seven years, and when he was elderly for six years. He had a great love for Panagia. While he was a young boy still living in his village, she appeared to him and said: "Go, and I will always

be with you." He lived eighty years of his life on the Holy Mountain.

The well-known ascetic Hadjigiorgis of Athos, when still a novice, spent four years labouring in the cave of the righteous Niphon the Kafsokalyvitan. There in total quietness, fasting and prayer, he was instructed by his spiritual father Neophytos, who lived in St. George's hut and frequently visited him to give him Holy Communion.

The ascetic conduct of Hadjigiorgis, in Kafsokalyvia and later in Kerasia with his group of monks, made history. Because of his fasting at great lengths, he was called "the fasting one." Both he and his monks never cooked or ate non-fasting foods. They ate mainly nuts and honey. At Pascha they coloured boiled potatoes instead of eggs.

He never used medication. When any of the brothers had a cold, he lightly warmed up the oven which was made of bricks and mud and placed the brother in it, and he would be cured. If anyone had any other ailment, he would stand him in front of Panagia's icon, and together they would pray all night. At the end of the Divine Liturgy, the sick person took communion and was cured. He had a large group of pious labouring monks around him.

Hadjigiorgis owned only one garment and went barefoot. He wore thick woollen socks only when he was in church.

There was a Russian ascetic on Mount Athos whose feet were badly infected, and he never took any medicine for his illness,

nor accepted any other treatment. "I am a monk," he would often say in his Russian style of speaking; "I must suffer. "

The famous spiritual father Ilarion the Iviritan never ate or drank on Fridays, to honour Christ's crucifixion.

Spiritual father Savvas, Ilarion's obedient disciple, was his equal in ascesis. He ate only once a day and for the last two years of his life was sustained daily only from the Holy Communion left after each Liturgy and with a cup of coffee every afternoon. Every night he prayed in his cell with suspensions.'

The ever memorable Loakim Spetsieris, knowing the benefits of ascetic hardship, never used heat in the church nor in his cell, even in mid-winter. His obedient subordinate Theophylaktos, whom we met several times at New Skete, told us about his spiritual father, who used to say to him, "Father Theophylaktos, how did the fathers endure ascesis sitting on top of poles under difficult conditions? Did they not feel the cold? Yet we, wrapped in our clothes, feel the cold even in our homes!"

In these present eschatological times we are not making brave decisions and superhuman efforts in the ascetic arena of spiritual heroic contestants. Such a contestant in endurance, patience, ascesis and hardship is our contemporary Romanian ascetic Heriodionos, who for forty years has been in seclusion in his tiny cell, unclothed, impoverished, but happy and blessed. His

entire existence, like a burning candle, is consumed by prayer, silence, and vision. He communicates with his visitors through a small window. Some loving, charitable fathers supply him with what is necessary to live on, this spiritual bird of the sky.

An elder once said to some sisters:

Ascesis should be done to the point that one stays healthy and able to complete any task assigned. Anything done in excess affects the body, and then a person cannot do what is necessary. One should let her spiritual mother know the number of prostrations she is doing. Vigil is superior to fasting, as it helps to purify the mind and creates sweetness in the heart. Sleeping makes one lethargic.

We ought to force ourselves in the spiritual life, since we frequently may lose our spiritual appetite. When we make ourselves eat a little bit, we get our appetite back. The same applies when one's arm is dislocated. It won't heal unless it is exercised. A dislocated arm must be forced suddenly back into place. We should not resemble the tortoise that started to go to a wedding and arrived when the first-born baby was baptized.

I once met two Russian ascetics, Nikodemos and Seraphim, in the Holy Mountain's most formidable desert, Karoulia, where the strictest ascetics live. They were known for their Great Lenten fasting, partaking of only one coffee a day and some water. Indeed works of supermen!

There are also many other unknown athletes of the fast who quenched all passions, who existed and still to this day exist in the Athonite arena of purification of the passions, and who are the marvel of both angels and men.

In 1969 I received a letter from the hermit D., whom I had asked to provide information to me about what he knew concerning the ascetic endeavours on Athos, so that my readers could see that even in the present age, there are giants of asceticism on the Holy Mountain who are no different from those of old. In his letter he says the following:

Certainly in our times such figures exist, as we ourselves have witnessed: men who exert such an influence that they could be a powerful cure to our perverted generation. For example, one author and theologian, a wise scholar, has written about an Athonite monk who for fifty days ate nothing at all, in addition to all his other ascetic labours. The author admired this and praised God for such contestants still existing in our time, men like those we read about in the writings of the desert fathers. 'Moreover,' this wise scholar continues, 'Glory be to God that even now He provides such contestants.' I did not doubt when I read such things, Father Loannikios. I wondered, though, and was asking myself, 'How is it possible for a man to survive without food for fifty days?'

Fortunately for me, even as I was pondering this, something happened that convinced me that it is possible. An elderly ascetic, possessionless and simple, a little bit older than sixty, came to my hut during Cheesefare Week and fell asleep there after we had dinner together. Next morning, the first day of Great Lent, a matter came up and, as I could not go myself, I sent him instead. He gladly went to Vigla, a distance of five hours' walk from here. After he had accomplished his mission, he returned to the hut at night, and I begged him to accept some food and drink because he was an old man and tired; but he refused. I asked him again to eat something on the third day, but he still refused. Then I was amazed and wanted to know how, since he was old and tired from the long walk, he could not feel hungry or thirsty. He replied simply, 'I did not eat anything last year during the whole of Great Lent until Palm Sunday and then

only the Holy Communion.' I would have been less astounded at that moment if a bomb had exploded in front of me, but I had no reason to doubt his word, since I had talked with him many times and knew him to be a man of truthfulness, modesty, and innocence. He did not suspect that I was going to make this matter known and so did not try to hide anything from me. I personally attribute this to Divine Providence: it was revealed to me so that others might benefit from it, especially me — in order to make me humble, I who am unable to fast for even one day.

Elder Avimelech from Logovarda's holy monastery in Paros was an ascetic at various locations on Mount Athos. He had lived near the shore of St. Anne's in a cave where he built a church in honour of the ninety-nine holy fathers of Crete. Then he went to St. Basil's desert for great ascesis and finally settled in the Dormition of the Theotokos hut of Small St. Anne's, above Dionysiou and the Mitrophanis cave. There he laboured to the day of his repose at the age of one hundred and seven.

Elder Germanos from Kafsokalyvia slept in the Lord at the age of one hundred and five in 1875. He had arrived on Mount Athos in 1830 and was under obedience to the Elder Daniel who was lame and lived in the hut of the Archangels. When Father Germanos first arrived there on a Tuesday, there was nothing for him to eat. "My child," said one of the spiritual fathers, "go to Elder Daniel who is ill and has nothing."

"Yes, Father," Elder Germanos replied. "He may have nothing and be poor and lame, but I do not need an elder to feed me. I need an elder to guide my soul." So Father Germanos went to

Elder Daniel and stayed with him, enduring patiently and with love the many hardships of their life. Two years later, in addition to being handicapped, Elder Daniel lost his sight. Like a good, obedient monk, Father Germanos cared for him in his old age, and finally buried him. After thirty years in Kafsokalyvia he went to Chairi, to the hermitage where the Romanian Gerasimos led his ascetic life.

The Russian hieromonk Parthenios, despite his royal descent, led a strict ascetic life in Karoulia. He did not cook but ate only dry foods. He used no heat in winter and had no bed. Instead, he slept on a hide and for a pillow he used a tree stump. He was polite, friendly and above all, charitable.

Spiritual father B. used to say that fasting is the mother of good health, and he once said to a doctor, "I fast, and you do not. Let us have a race walking. Spirituality changes a man, turns him into steel!" He ate only once a day. A hot drink was his only sustenance at night. He fasted for all of Great Lent, drinking only broth from boiled greens and one glass of wine. He lived in Aegina near St. Nectaries for twelve years. He used to harness himself to the well-wheel in order to draw water.

I remember that the most pious Iviritan hieromonk Athanasios never wore heavy socks over the course of the whole winter. He lived the idiorhythmic style of monasticism, where each monk cooks his own meals separately, but he never actually cooked at

all. Instead, he simply ate a small portion of whatever was served to guests in the reception room.

Before he received an inner spiritual illumination and as a result returned to his homeland of Cyprus, Hieromonk Kyprianos (1880-1955) lived on Athos for a thousand days, beginning in 1905. While on the Holy Mountain he led a very ascetic life, with voluntary suffering and deprivation, in Simonopetra's monastery and then in Katounakia. He slept only four hours a day. His north-facing room had no heat, nor did he have extra blankets. He owned just one pair of slippers his entire life. He did not wash for fifty years. He was sanctified through illness and nurtured by pain. After he lost his voice, he prayed endlessly with raised arms until they would fall down from his exhaustion.

In the desolate hut which is part of the cave of St. Peter, the j first Athonite, lived the hermits Chrysostomos and his obedient monk, who led there an unsurpassed ascetic life. They wore tattered clothes, went barefoot, and fed on dry bread and chestnuts or whatever else was sent to them from Lavra, in spite of their unkempt and sad appearance, their faces shone with heavenly radiance and sweetness. All this was witnessed and recorded by Dionysios the Lavriotan, the Bishop of Trikes and Stagon, who ordained me as deacon and who frequently with his elder visited the spiritual arena of St. Peter's cave.

New Skete's elder Chrysostomos endured ascesis and illness patiently. In spite of the doctor's orders for him to take some

meat broth, he replied: "I'd rather die! It is not allowed by the skete's rules." Finally, by God's grace, he recovered.

St. Silouanos the Athonite used to tell us,
Here is what happened to me in the metochion: I would eat until I was full. Two hours later I would be hungry again. I began to weigh myself and strangely enough, I saw what I had gained, three okas in three days! I realized then that this was a temptation, for we monks ought to starve our bodies. There are passions of the body which hinder prayer, and God's spirit is not present when one's stomach is full. One ought to know from experience the limits of fasting so that his body is not weakened to the point of being unable to fulfil his obedience.

Father Euthymios, who had been previously married, lived with his obedient monk Father Matthew for sixteen year in the unapproachable cave of St. Neilos the Myrrh-gusher. After his wife had reposed, he had come to Mount Athos to become a monk. At first he served as Lavra's spiritual father, labouring in the cave of St. Athanasios the Athonite. Then he went to St. Neilos the Myrrh-gusher's cave. He had come from Konitsa in Epirus. Elder Methodios, now an aged man, had served him. He told us the following-. "father Euthymios used to wear an undershirt coated with wax." Elder Methodios would carry him on his back up the steep steps to St. Neilos' holy kellion.

What can we say about Philaretos, who exercised great force on himself? Even on the feast day of Pascha he never omitted reading the Ninth Hour.

His Eminence Archbishop Timotheos of Crete wrote about hermit elder Avimelech: "He was as solemn as a prophet, as meek as an Apostle, and he stood tall, this heavy-set ascetic. He reminded us with his presence of those great desert fathers who were filled with grace."

There was a monk of St. Paul's named Gerasimos. He worked as a tireless typikaris for forty years. The most amazing thing about him was that he never sat down during any of the long services and vigils. He remained a steadfast pillar of patience in spite of the fact that he suffered from a double hernia. What was the reason for this diamond-hard attitude? For many days he had observed a tame sparrow up on a tree limb standing on one leg, singing melodiously all day long, praising the Creator of all things, but always standing on one leg.

This ever memorable one used to say, "If a disabled and weak bird can stand on only one leg all its life, what then ought I to do during the Divine Liturgy when praises are sung to the Lord?" Such was his awareness and watchfulness of himself that he would not undress for bed at night but would sleep in his monastic habit.

Elder Joseph the Hesychast was like a catapult against any self-love. He never spared himself, persevering in all ascetic labours. Usually each year immediately after the feast day of Pascha was over, following a winter of seclusion in their hut, he and his ascetic companion Father Arsenios would go to the top of Athos. Most of the time while there they stayed in their beloved chapel of Panagia below the mountain's peak. Their drinking water was snow boiled in the copper pot they had brought in

their knapsack. They fed on boiled greens and bulbs. At that location, two thousand metres above the sea, the winds were very strong; to protect themselves, they spent the night sheltered in ravines and caves where, if necessary, they used the capes they wore instead of rasos as blankets. Father Arsenios told us that they often did their prostrations standing barefoot in the snow in order to overcome sleepiness.

Once during these ascetic wanderings they stayed in the remote chapel above Great Lavra where St. Gregory Palamas—teacher of the Jesus Prayer, preacher of grace, and defender of monasticism—did his ascetic labours. One night while they were praying, demons started a great disturbance, shouting "You have burned us, you have burned us, go away from here!" and swearing with vile words. Father Arsenios, who had heard them this time as well, asked in his usual simple manner, "What are they screaming about? Who are they?"

"They are temptations," Elder Joseph replied. "I not only hear them. I also see them. Be calm! They are bothered by what we are doing."

In Kerasia we met and were blessed by the most reverend spiritual father Hierotheos, who succeeded Hadjigiorgis, the one famous for fasting. He told us all about Hadjigiorgis letter to the Bishop of Chios, in which was an account of his and his disciple's ascetic endeavours. In that letter the great ascetic insistently explained his views to the Bishop that by fasting on Saturday and Sunday as well as on the feast day of Pascha, he did not ignore the Holy Canons.

I take the following from my diary:

October 5, 1968: This morning I set out from St. Anne's Skete to visit the Karouliotan ascetic elder Gabriel, who for two months

now has been bedridden. His hut is suspended in Karoulia like an eternal oil lamp in the sanctuary of the Holy Mountain's desert.

I entered through the first door carefully. Beneath the small landing, there was a chasm, a precipice. I opened the second door, saying, 'Through the prayers of our holy fathers,' and entered. Now I came across not the Father Gabriel I had always known—never still, always energetic, as if he were made of steel, who carried all the gravel during the night to cover the desolate path. Now he groaned constantly. He was paralysed from the waist down. He tried to say something but barely managed to utter a word. He was in unbearable pain. 'What can I say to you now, my father?'

'I am in pain!' he replied to my request that he say something beneficial to me.

'Make no effort, Elder. I understand. I came for your blessing and a promise. If you find a presence before God, do not forget me.'

'I to find a presence? The unworthy Gabriel? Such a thing would not be possible,' and he continued moaning in pain.

He was like a skeleton. He refused to eat some food cooked in oil which might have strengthened him. I saw a plate with boiled potatoes, which the Danielite fathers had brought to him, placed on a barrel filled with faeces!

I tried to remove it from there.

'Leave it there,' he ordered sternly. It appeared that he always did things this way, this philosopher of the desert, so that he might resist gluttony.

He simply would not eat, so as not to break his fast. His food had been olives for years, so that he could receive communion three or four times a week.

I dared to say to him, 'Geronda, if you could have an injection it might help.'

'An injection?' he said, and looked at me sternly, with his eyes

wide open. He had never taken any medication. He trusted himself entirely to the hands of his beloved God, and waited in great suffering to meet Him. 'I am waiting for death at any moment.' 'May our Panagia grant you patience, Elder,' I replied. I received his blessing, was filled with emotion, and all the way back prayed for heroic Elder Gabriel.

Pious elder Nikandros from Konstamonitou refused to become an administrator, because he was a humble man who wanted no position of authority. When he came to Mount Athos he brought a lot of money with him by which he was tempted a great deal. He felt better as soon as he got rid of it. He became free. He persevered in asceticism. He was an Infirmarian and a helper in the kitchen, surprising everyone: though he was old, he worked hard, with enthusiasm and energy. Despite the fact that he was aged and sick, even when he was in St. Antonios' Kathisma, he would read Vespers lying in bed under his covers, and during the night he would sense his guardian angel near him, holding him and urging him saying, "Keep on with your rule of obedience."

Our contemporary hermit of Kapsala, Elder Methodios, a disciple of the great ascetic father Tychon, used to tell me: "Father Tychon would not allow us to throw out the fish bones. He would use them over and over again, boiling them, and making the broth into a soup."



On Raising Children

An elder said:

Prayer is trusting God. When your trust is completely in God, it is not even necessary to pray for something, for God takes over. It's just that one ought to wait with patience for the fruit to ripen and fall off the tree. Therefore, parents, trust your children in God.

For you have given them only your flesh, but God has created their souls. So He is obliged to take care of them.

Another elder offered the following thoughts:

A child needs a lot of guidance and love. Watching television is destructive.

A man gives his flesh to his child. God creates a child's soul.

When a child grows up, the parents are not responsible for him any longer. God assigns a guardian angel to every person born, to help him through his entire life. Therefore should we not trust in God ourselves?

You ought to help your children to a point. Beyond that, leave them under God's care. Their guardian angel is always by them. One might say, 'If a person yields to temptation, his guardian angel stays away. But the angel does not despair; he stands nearby. Even when one goes astray, still God through the guardian angel sends good thoughts to that person.

We should not distance ourselves from God, for that is so painful. The guardian angel tries throughout one's life to introduce good thoughts, waits and suffers, is saddened when a man commits a sin, and stands before God empty-handed. Let us think about that! That alone creates such pain! If for only this reason, one should not distance himself from God's presence by refusing to do His will. Some angels with some effort, and some with none at all, present a man's soul to God. But other angels with great effort, torment and suffering come before God empty-handed. It is so painful. Imagine! It is worthwhile for one to strive with dignity so that his guardian angel might not be hurt. There are many people who have seen their guardian angel. If

only one can see his angel, he will not ask for anything else. When we see little infants smile when sleeping, it is because they see their angel.

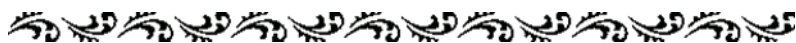
You ought to teach small children how to pray, for God answers their prayers. The children's prayer ought to enter their hearts. There is no benefit from a prayer unless it is from the depth of one's heart.

Try to help children when they are small with kindness, so that they experience a deeper meaning of life. Always treat them with kindness.

To his visitors an experienced ascetic gave good advice on raising children:

I am still sad because I did not go to confession until I was eighteen years old. I am still sad about it. When a child is about six to seven, it is time to see a spiritual father. Let it be so.

So, as soon as you return to your homes from the Holy Mountain, pay attention to your children, catechize them, and guard them, especially with your prayers. Pray as Patriarch Jacob prayed for his children. Pray like this 'Holy Theotokos, protect, help and oversee my children.' Also cross yourselves while praying and chant a hymn to Panagia. Watch over them. Make sure you know where they go at night and with whom they keep company. For bad company destroys good morals. Your child might be good, but someone else's might be a bad influence on him. This is my advice to all lay people.



On Discernment of Thought and Spirituality

The famous hesychast and confessor Father Gregorios lived in Small St. Anne's before the time of Father Savvas. He was given to frequent silence and constant prayer. He spoke only when necessary and everyone marvelled at his divine gift of fluent,

inspired speech. Fie became the stronghold and support of cenobitic monks, hermits, and, lay pilgrims.

This wisest of spiritual fathers, because of his discernment, led to repentance Captain Georgakis, the leader of a robber-band. He managed to do this by using an admirable strategy. He pretended that he too was guilty of many crimes which were even greater than the bandit's. By this ruse he gained the trust and confidence of the ferocious Georgakis and thus tamed him and brought him around to a complete change of heart. He also promised to give the bandit Holy Communion every day, under one condition: that they both would fast for forty days. Georgakis agreed. Father Gregorios did not give him the actual Holy Gifts, however, but ordinary bread and wine, until the forty-day penance was finished. Then he gave him the real communion.

The hegumen of St. Dionysios, the elder Gabriel, told me this story:

Over fifty years ago near Karyes (in Koutloumousiou's skete) lived an elder and father confessor who was simple-mannered and with little education, but with a cleansed mind which had been applied carefully to the study of God's word. His obedience was to knit garters which were worn by the civil guards of Mount Athos and the mountain people of Roumeli and Epiros. When he came to Karyes to sell his product on Saturdays for the weekly market, he would stand under the cemetery's shed near the main road holding his prayer rope in his right hand and his crafts in his left. With his eyes always turned downward he uttered the Jesus Prayer unceasingly: 'Lord Jesus, have mercy on us.' If anyone teased him and said, 'Look around for some customers!' he would reply, as long as they see me it is not necessary for me to look at them.' They say this man of

discernment had such perception that he could clearly see the underlying fault of a person in confession and then concisely and laconically give instructions for correction.

Having heard about him, Ecumenical Patriarch Loakim III, who at that time was staying on Mount Athos, went to Karyes to meet him. He approached the elder and asked to go to his hut that afternoon in order to make his confession.

'My hut is too small, Your Holiness, to receive a patriarch/ the elder replied.

'It does not matter if it is small,' the Patriarch answered.

'But it is too low for you to pass under, Your Holiness!'

'I will stoop down to enter,' repeated the great patriarch.

'Unfortunately you do not bow!' said the Elder. 'If you had put your head down, you could have been a patriarch a long time ago!' He meant that the Patriarch was arrogant and had an unyielding attitude. Many times the Patriarch would say about that incident, as long as I live I will never forget my discussion with that elder—a simple man, but one of great discernment.

To this same spiritual father came another elder who was complaining that his young monk in obedience, even though everything was easy for him and he was not burdened with \ much work—since he had only his rule of prayer—was nevertheless overcome by many anxious thoughts and therefore in danger of spiritual confusion because of depression. \ This elder who was in charge of him had come to Elder Gabriel to seek advice and help in the matter.

"Marry him off," the elder replied. When he heard this, he was dumbfounded and looked at him in amazement, as if he had heard nothing. "Put him to work," the elder repeated. "Young people can be humbled and can be quieted I down only through

regular work. For a monk prayer only, without work, is the same as work without prayer. Marry i him to his work!"

"Anytime there are temptations and troubles, there are also laurels of victory," the pious Elder Gregorios would say to Hieromonk Loakim Spetsieris, and then he would add: "If it were possible to find a monastery filled with angels, and; they placed you as one of the brothers in it, still you would j not be saved, because no one would bother you, and you would be living an easy life and this saying would be suitable to your situation: 'In your lifetime you received your good things'." "My father, I am losing the battle in a carnal war," Hieromonk Loakim Spetsieris told Elder Gregorios once; "I cannot rest either day or night!"

"Do not despair," he replied. "This is a sign that rewards are near. Do not be afraid. Our Christ does not allow for us to be tempted more than we can endure." And soon after he blessed him, he was freed from the temptation.

An elder said that Hadjigiorgis, because he was a novice once himself, understood monks in obedience. "He pruned carefully and clipped with discernment."

A hermit said:

When you pay back all your debts in this life, you can be saved. However, if you. are hit on the head many times, you receive a bit of an extra reward. For an unjustly beaten person there is a pure reward. This means that frequently God permits those who

lead good lives to be badly afflicted. Why is this so?

Let me explain with an example. There is a happy family where all its members are good: father, mother, and children. They are churchgoers and receive communion regularly. Suddenly a drunkard or crazy person kills the good father of the family for no reason. Because of this many people who have been distanced from God say, 'Look at him! You see? He was a churchgoer and that is what happened to him!'

What insolence! God allows those who are not at fault to suffer in order to give a second chance to the unrepentant, that they might be brought to repentance through seeing the suffering of the innocent and thus be like the good thief who was hanged next to Christ on the cross.

What do we observe in those two robbers between whom the Lord was crucified? One blasphemed against Christ saying, 'If you are the Christ save yourself and us.' But the other rebuked him saying, 'We are receiving the just reward of our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong. Do you not even fear God?' (Luke 23:39-41)

This is why God allows some innocent people to suffer — so that the insolent ones may benefit, although those who suffer are truly God's beloved. In paradise I believe that God will say to them, 'Here, this mansion is for you, or you can choose any one you like!'

Do you understand? This is the way it is. When we ask to be justified, we may lose everything. We lose our peace of mind and our reward.

One of the most illumined and discerning fathers of Mount Athos was Elder Daniel, who built for the Agioritan fathers a holy hut in Katounakia's desert. There his group of monks in obedience were named after him "the Danielites," because of their elder's rare and charismatic personality.

He became famous as a wise spiritual guide to many cenobitic monks, hermits and lay people because of his virtue and his education, which came from experience. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he was especially able to discern whatever traps and ambushes were set by evil spirits who, in the warfare launched by Satan, come from the right.² These temptations from the right include all actions of a person which display false virtues delusions, exaggerations, actions, without a blessing, boasting and vanity. All these things lead to Satanic pride.

One of those brothers who was misled by Satan was the Konstamonitan father Damaskinos. He thought that he could become a recluse like one of the heroic ascetics, without asking his hegumen's blessing. He decided not to go out of the monastery at all. He went from his cell only to the church and the trapeza, and he completed his obedience tasks as assigned. He spent ten years of his life thinking he was a recluse, but filled with such pride!

Meanwhile, because he thought himself so virtuous, his pride was increasing along with contempt for others, criticism, and disputes and quarrels with the rest of the monks. Because the problem was not being corrected, the hegumen sent for the revered Elder Daniel, who came willingly because he was always ready to help.

The discerning Father Daniel called to himself the deluded Damaskinos, and with a characteristically sweet manner reasoned with him and slowly brought him to his senses and to repentance. Father Daniel used examples from the Old and New Testaments, Moses, the Israelites, and the Fathers, and said to him, "Brother, be careful from now on not to trust yourself and your own thoughts, but repeat that wise saying of Abba Dorotheos: 'Cursed be your thoughts and the knowledge you create'."

The elders of Mount Athos say: "Not the place, but how you behave saves you."

An elder said:

We ought to be happy rather than sad when we are unjustly mistreated. We must not try to be justified by people even when we are right. Since God is just, and we are focusing on the life to come, it does not make sense to try to have the understanding of others, or to be treated well, or to be recognized for what we are worth and not be treated unjustly, and so forth. If we follow that route in this life, we have to realize that the path we follow will not lead to paradise.

An illiterate and simple hermit told me: "Those who are too clever are quickly caught in Satan's web because they are filled with ego, my blessed father. They are like crabs caught in a fishing net."

Some time ago I met a cenobitic monk who spoke in a wonderfully expressive way. He talked about the fear of God, about piety, and about human logic. Never before in my life had I met anyone who could express himself in such a vivid way. His words were like a spring of water gushing forth, His speech was exact, pure, fiery and accompanied with graceful and spontaneous gestures. He would say such things "A person who is respectful fears God. One who fears God is also humble. God watches over the humble. Only the humble person is logical. The arrogant person is illogical."

And, "He who does not care for his soul either becomes brutal, turns into a beast, or is filled with self-delusion."

What is monasticism?

"Hard work," an experienced elder replied.

"Indeed," said a contemporary ascetic to a newly drafted soldier of Christ. "If you wish to be successful in the monastic calling, I have one thing to say to you, my child: make sure you love physical labour."

The great hesychast Chariton the Confessor, any time he received a guest, which he did with much love and kindness, used to say, "At that time Christ began to work and to preach." He avoided idle talk and chatter as if they were the cause of countless ills.

A respected monk from New Skete would say to me: "On every feast day of Pascha when we say 'Christ is risen,' we commemorate the angel's proclamation in front of the empty tomb of Christ. Those who leave the church immediately after 'Christ is risen' is sung are not Christians. The ones who remain to celebrate the Divine Liturgy are the Christians."

Elder Gregorios from Xenophontos' skete, a monk who is over a hundred years old, told us, "When we were beginner monks we would ask our spiritual father to read us a prayer in church for

our passions of idle talk."

He also said, "A monk without a rule of obedience is not a monk."

"Monastics who live the idiorhythmic style of life cannot be corrected," the pious Lavriotan Elder Theophilos used, to say, wanting in this way to describe to us all the bad; aspects of such monasteries.

Admirable monk Theophylaktos from Kafsokalyvia said to a young novice, "If you wish to be a good monk, remember this through all your life: praise God for your having been deprived of all expected individual rights. Use a wooden bed to sleep on. On the feast day of Pascha eat one sardine and some greens with a spoonful of oil.

"A monastic has no rights in this life so that he can be free. How many the Devil has destroyed by attacking them with the passion of wanting individual rights."

An elder said: "The more spiritual a person is, the fewer rights he wants in his life."

We asked an elder how many years he had been on the Holy Mountain, and he replied, "I have been here many years, but

have made no progress. Jackals who live in the wilderness always remain jackals."

An old ascetic said, 'A God-fearing person respects everyone. My elder bowed with respect even to the most insignificant and unworthy person.'

An elder said,
People have distanced themselves from their spiritual fathers and lost themselves in thoughts and various passions so that they end up making their confession to a psychiatrist who feeds them with pills in order to forget their problems. Shortly afterwards, the same problems resurface and everything is repeated all over again. If a person takes care of his inner state, however, he can sleep like a lamb, and he does not need pills or anything else. Living in a desert does not do a thing unless I, being in the desert, have also abandoned my passions. Or again, that place is not a desert when I adjust it to my ways instead of adjusting myself to being in the desert.

An elder said, "God does not predestine, but He does have foreknowledge. "

An elder said:
When you express your opinion to others, do it so that they can benefit from it. If you are going to chatter, do it only with God. No person can get tired when talking to Him, for praying is

restful. Many times we pray for someone who is ill, and others are praying for him also, and despite this, the person dies, and those who have prayed for him wonder why God did not hear their prayers. They do not realize that God did hear them, but that He knew what would be best. We do not know what would have been the outcome of that person's life had he lived. We should praise God for everything.

An old monk said, "The cliffs become palaces for monks, and the sky is the roof covering them. The ground is their 1 mattress and their food is nuts and wild greens. The un-f tamed beasts are their neighbours. The caves become royal chambers."

"Elder, is it difficult to be a monastic?" we asked a wise monk. "It is not difficult," he replied, "when you have forgotten yourself entirely. Then you realize that it is the easiest burden to carry."

An elder said:

For anyone to obtain help, he needs to have his ear's receiver turned on, in order to receive someone else's signals. When the heart is not receptive, one must ask God to turn it on first so that His divine word can be received.

Approach those distanced from God with a simple manner, humility and genuine love. Pretend that you do not see most of the things that are wrong with them and correct only what is absolutely necessary, because people are weary and burdened with life and do not like to be corrected by anyone, no matter how well-intentioned.

"Priesthood is given as a manifestation of God's love for mankind," said Iviritan hieromonk Athanasios. "God loved us and made us his priests. A priestly celebrant loans his voice and hands to God to perform His Holy Mysteries. A priest is cleansed by God's grace when clothed in his vestments, unless there is a moral shortcoming, vindictiveness, or greed for money. Those who labour for God's word should first be ascetically prepared."

Barefoot elder Avvakoum would say to all spiritual fathers: "Giving advice is a holy matter because it is where two minds meet in love and humility." He especially emphasized that any counselling ought to be done with an abundance of love, humility, tolerance and peace, no matter at what time of the day a person might come seeking help. Monks, he insisted, ought to welcome everyone with a smile so that visitors will depart pleased and glorifying God.

An elder said:

We should not put God in a difficult position. He is all Love. God does not like to see us unhappy. What should God do then? Any time we are given grace abundantly, we boast; if we are not given this grace, we are unhappy, even despairing. Soon after we begin to try [to live the spiritual life] we get tired. Even if we go astray, this can be a helpful experience for us, because it is only in order to humble us that God sometimes withdraws His grace from us. This in fact is exactly how a man is humbled. Then when God's grace is given back to him again, he sees that he has grown in self-knowledge, and realizes that he

cannot rely on himself, but that he needs God's help. It is like a baby: as soon as he is able to hold his mother's hand, he tries to walk. He takes big steps and thinks that he is doing just fine, imagining that he is walking on his own. If this continues, the child becomes dependant, because if we hold his hand all the time, he gets a false sense of security and then tumbles when he actually does attempt to walk by himself.

Sometimes the Devil manages to use us to tempt our brother. When we pray for God to give us love, God then might allow a brother to become ill so that we may be granted an opportunity to show our love when the sick brother asks for help. The sick one might ask you, 'Bring me some tea, bring me this, bring me that. ...' In this way God will test both your love and your patience.

Sometimes God withdraws the grace from our superiors, and they speak to us abruptly. This tests us, to see if we will judge or not, we who have previously asked Him to give us the virtue of restraint from criticism.

A discerning contemporary aged father said,
We do not speak on behalf of freedom when we say to others that everything is permitted. This is slavery. Only through difficulties can one gain progress. Here is an example: we have a young tree. We take care of it, we tie it to a post with rope. We do not use wire, for that would harm it. But we do put a gentle restriction around it. This is the only way to take care of it. Here is another case, a small child: we restrict his freedom from his very conception, because for nine months he lives within the confinement of his mother's womb. After his birth he is wrapped in swaddling clothes. As he grows, a gate is placed around him, and so forth. These restrictions are necessary until the child is more mature. Outwardly his freedom is taken away, but without

any protection the child might not have lived to grow up.

The grace-filled elder Avvakoum from Lavra would say, Joy comes from one's relationship and union with God. Mankind has been created to be joyful, not sad. When you enjoy the wrong things, you will inevitably pay back for all this pleasure you have had. But God's joy demands no repayment. For instance, I, who own nothing in this world, cannot pay for the happiness I have. I am not the only one proclaiming this truth. My brother monks, who also have nothing else besides God, are filled with joy. I have emptied myself for Christ's sake. I have nothing but my Lord— and joy. Poverty is beautiful for it sets you free. One should empty himself to make room for Christ to enter his heart. When the Lord is with me, there is my happiness also. In each ascetic cave you will find spiritual joy.

An old ascetic told a group of priests who visited him that To allow time for prayer, one should not spend time on anything that can be looked after by someone else. For example, a doctor does not deal with gauzes and bandages, because the nurse can do that. The doctor takes care of more serious matters, such as examining a patient or performing an operation. If he spends time on minor things, he will not have time for the important ones, and no one will benefit from his medical expertise. The same applies to you. Pray for your parishioners, and underline the names of those who are in greater need than others. It helps to know what each particular person's problem is so that you can pray better for each case.

An elderly ascetic advised a priest in the following way: "Try as hard as you can to improve yourself and to become a better

priest. Then you will see that your parishioners will follow your example without your having to say anything to them. By this you will see that working on improving yourself becomes a silent example for others."

This same ascetic also said:

We should gradually introduce a person to good thoughts. Then everything else will be fine. A person is under demonic influence if there are no good thoughts. We must turn the right switch on. When we have everything on the same wavelength, then we can benefit by listening, as long as the right switch is on.

Young people who start a spiritual life should focus on the underlying causes of sin and should try always to have good thoughts. An old ascetic once went to the city for some errand, and when he returned to his skete the other brothers asked him what he had seen in the city. He said he had seen no people, only wild trees!

Nowadays people want to become saints with no effort, and some of them say, 'All theological teachings should be put through a Patristic sieve.' Actually we ought to sift everything through the Fathers' teachings and throw out whatever is garbage. We should research according to the Fathers. I will demonstrate with an example. We have copper, bronze and gold. These metals are of different quality. We have 12 carat gold and we have 24 carat. We choose the 24 carat. We need the cheaper metals too. But let us choose gold.

A monk who lived in Holy Trinity's hut of St. Anne's Skete was attacked by the demon of sloth to the point of desperation. One day in his discouragement he said, "I will climb up and sit at the edge of a cliff and swing my legs to pass the time." It was the

eve of St. John the Baptist's feast day, celebrated at St. Dionysios Monastery.

He climbed up and sat on the edge of a cliff and started swinging his legs while murmuring the Jesus Prayer — but not all the time, of course, just now and then, since he was full of demonic sloth. While he was sitting there in this lazy manner, a battalion of demons passed by, headed for St. Dionysios Monastery to tempt the monks there. One of the demons said to the others: "I will mock that half dead body in black which is sitting up there."

"Don't go, he will burn you," said the other demons. But that demon went anyway and appeared as a monk before the novice and said to him, "What are you doing here?"

"Not much," replied the young monk. "I am lazy and unable to offer anything to my Lord except to sit here and swing my legs." Hearing these humble words, the demon left him immediately and returned to join his group.

This event has been passed down by elders who advise young novices who are having difficulties keeping up with their rules of obedience.

An old hesychast would say: "A person's mind and heart cannot be cleansed when focused on the world and its affairs."

A Katouniotan hermit by the name of Raphael would say this to himself over and over again: "Everything on earth is temporary, but all things above are for eternity."

An elder said, "For a monk, the experience of the world is like a person handling coal."

Another elder said: "The fact that monasticism is blossoming in our times is an indication that God is preparing something great for the world. The whole world is in crisis. People are thirsty for spiritual things."

An elder would say to novices, "When we come to stay in a monastery we should leave the world behind us, along with its habits, comforts and luxuries."

An elder said: "The spiritual life of a monk starts when he distances himself from all visible and invisible things and focuses entirely on God." And he also said, "When I was still in the world everyone called me 'Monk,' so I said to myself, 'Since you are a monk, what are you still doing in the world?'"

Monk Michael the Lavriotan, an Infirmarian in Lavra, was an example for his energy and good service. He would finish celebrating the Liturgy to the very end, in all its detail. He would work anywhere at any time. He was pale and had a shining, ascetic appearance.

Hermit elder Damaskinos from St. Basil told us about a monk from Kafsokalyvia who lived a long time ago. He had neglected his rule of obedience⁶ and other spiritual duties. At the end of

his life of sloth and neglect, he fell ill, and while he was dying, his soul for many days would not leave his body. This happened in 1935-36.

The doctor, a discerning monk, realized that this was happening to him because he had been careless through all his life. Then Father Gregorios, the dying monk's spiritual father, knelt down and prayed fervently with compassion and love for his subordinate and promised before God and man that he would fulfil the monk's rule in all its completeness.

As he ended his prayer, that very moment the dying monk reposed peacefully.

A monk said, "These days we try to achieve sainthood with very little effort." And he said again, "The harder you try the more grace you receive." Then he added, "God could fill our hearts with so much bliss and love for Him, that we might not be able to endure it and would flee the monasteries, seeking seclusion in a cave. And lay people, if they experienced such a degree of bliss, might abandon their responsibilities, their families and children, and hide away from them. This is why God, who is all Love, does not fill us totally with His bliss."

An elder said: "People are so stressed these days, and they will not find real happiness in parties and worldly entertainment." And he also said: "In our times tradition is gone. the saints should be our only examples."

Another elder said, "If your spiritual father gives evidence of denying himself, accept all his advice. If you do not tell him

everything, he cannot give you the right advice for you. The Lord says, 'If a prophet has been deceived, I am responsible for it. For your heart is not set straight.' Don't be two-faced! "

An elder said, "I am unable to describe to you, my son, the kind of joy I felt every time I was unjustly treated by men. I felt that I was sharing the injustice that Christ suffered."

There once was a cenobitic monk who was careless. In spite of this, his hegumen put up with him, wishing the monk's salvation, saying that "Panagia will save him since he has never left her garden." It was obvious that the hegumen's hope was based on the monk's original zeal and piety.

Through his hard work, Elder Ignatios of Dionysiou turned the rugged mountainside into a real orchard, a fruitful olive grove. He always carried an axe in his belt and some tools in his knapsack, and with enthusiasm he cleared the forest area on the mountainside across from his monastery. He grafted all the wild olive trees. It was because of his interest and zeal for the monastery's progress that he left behind this legacy. It is also worth mentioning that his hard work on the olive grove was always accompanied by blessed humility and works of charity.

"Carelessness can destroy pious men! A horrible thing!" an experienced ascetic elder exclaimed.

In St. Paul's holy monastery, we met a distinguished Romanian hieromonk and confessor, Father Makarios, who would say that "Those who are able to pray with a cleansed heart are those who labour and are participants in the Holy Mysteries."

A pious monk advised, "Love everyone, but have no particular friendship with anyone."

I knew a monk who never put his prayer rope down. He prayed unceasingly, anytime, and everywhere he went. God had given him an endless desire for prayer in his heart.

This is what the white-bearded cenobitic hieromonk S. would say: "Once there were eight thousand monks on Mount Athos, and in spite of all difficulties which existed then — hard work and endless ascetic labours — we had everything. Now the young monks even have cars. Their anxieties and worries for material possessions are like an epidemic. The more they have, the more trouble is present. It is a vicious circle. The cause of this," he continued, "is sin, which destroys both body and soul."

An elder said, "In our times monasteries are saved through temptations, for virtues are attained when one resists temptation. Those who can endure all of the Devil's temptations will be like one of those fathers of the past, provided he can endure to the

end of his life. This means that patience without complaining is equal to the rule of prayer."

A different ascetic elder said, "Evil is everywhere, and darkness prevails. It resembles a newly ploughed field with its dark soil turned over. And if you plant in it, seeds will soon sprout and we will reap the fruit at harvest time."

Hesychastic elder Joseph said: "The main aim of the Devil is to attack our faith. If the Devil manages to make a person deny his faith, then he turns that person into a traitor."

Father Daniel and I both had the same spiritual father. His name was Averkios, and he was like a second Simple Paul. He was from St. John the Forerunner's kalyve. He had never left the Holy Mountain from the time he was a young boy, when he was brought to Mount Athos hidden in a basket covered with onions, at the time Greece was still under Turkish occupation. Father Averkios asked both of us to be his obedient monks.

"I will soon die," he said, "and who is going to light St. John's oil lamp?"

"Panagia will send you someone," I said, and then jokingly I added: "We are very difficult and you are strict." (Actually he was quieter than a little lamb.)

To this he replied, "I will make a list on one piece of paper of what are the virtues, and on another what are the sins, and without saying anything to you, I will present them to you." What a blessed soul! He was blessed in two ways: first with simplicity, and second with respect for a person's free will.

The hymnographer and elder Gerasimos, whom I greatly respected, a few years ago told me, "St. Gregory Palamas says that only one thing is impossible for God, and that is to become one with an unclean person. It never happens."

A Greek ascetic would take his craft, which was making brooms, to the Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon to sell in exchange for dried bread. In this way he earned his daily bread though his labour.

On the last days of his life we met the charismatic Elder Simeon, who had been under obedience to Father Savvas prior to that well-known elder's repose. Father Simeon told us many things about this virtuous and discerning man and also advised us: "Be afraid of sinning, not of the Devil, for he has no power."

An old hesychast said, "A novice obeys with piety without any questions. Later on, he reasons, which destroys obedience. He examines through the eyes of logic."

Hermit Chrystodoulos, who was under obedience to the watchful elder Kallinikos, would say to us anytime we visited him in his hut, "In our days it is imperative to try harder to attain patience. In the past, saints laboured hard for this virtue. We are

unable to match their ascesis. But at least we should try to have some patience, obedience and humility."

In 1968 my co-ascetic Father Daniel and I went to Karoulia, the most remote desert of Athos, to see the admirable Russian Hermit Elder Zosimas, a basket-maker. With him was his subordinate, Father Seraphim, who had a little know edge of Greek. He took us to their chapel honouring St. George. And in that desert we were offered three passages' from the Scriptures as spiritual treats:

"I have manifested Your name to the men whom you have given me out of the world. They were Yours, You gave them to Me"

"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power! to become the sons of God"

". . .to observe all things that I have commanded you! and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Father Seraphim also said, "We are going through difficult times. Soon the Antichrist will come; he will be of Jewish origin."

We also visited the hermit elder Andreas in his poverty! and illness. He was suffering from vertigo, but he was very patient. The following are two of the things he said:

We ought to practice the teachings of the Bible, not just read it. In our prayer our minds and hearts should be united. Restraint is a prerequisite for pure prayer. Do not judge your fellow man for anything. Exercise patience and obedience even to those who are younger than you. If you are ninety, obey someone who is eighteen.

Heavy but jolly Elder Bartholomeos also received us wholeheartedly, with ascetic hospitality. Some of his sayings are these:

Anytime we have tears while praying, then we are in close contact with God.

With our virtues we resemble God. The Jesus Prayer joins us with Him.

This is the way it is, my brothers: woe is me that I have lost the blessing of cenobitic life.

Obedience leads to humility, mourning, tears, cleansing and illumination.

After he had treated us with one fig each and some rain water from his reservoir, he told us about the pious elder Isaak the Dionysiatan and all his virtues.

Not long ago I had a discussion with one of the fathers of a skete about the patience and obedience of the mules which are used by the monks to transport heavy items through the steep, rocky paths of Mount Athos.

"These animals are good teachers for us, my brother," he said.

"They never complain, and they always wait patiently and blindly to obey."

Another venerable monk, one who took care of all the working animals of the monastery, would say that "Mules do their duties with no complaints. They carry heavy loads of wood in rain or cold. If they are fed or not, no complaints. I," he continued, "have been taught by these noble creatures. While feeding them I have often wept as I compared my impoliteness to their gentleness, my disobedience to their obedience."

Great hermit Daniel of Katounakia corrected and calmed a novice once who had despaired because of scandals and annoying happenings in their monastery. He told the novice: "Bear with the scandals, my son; no one is perfect."

A very pious monk said to me, "Have we asked Panagia, she who is the keeper, lady, and overseer of this mountain, whether or not she approves of constructing roads on Athos, or using cars, noise and engines, and having bureaucratic establishments within this monastic milieu? Is it possible that by all these things we ignore the Theotokos and all her promises for the Holy Mountain?"

A contemporary ascetic said, "These days there is plenty of flour to make dough for bread, but no yeast with which to raise it."

An Athonite saying goes: "Be as cautious about taking a stranger into your monastic group as you would of adopting a stray cat."

"Tell me what I should be most careful about, now that I am be to tonsured?" a novice once asked blind elder Auxentios the Gregoriatan, whose life was totally devoted to prayer which alternated between the Jesus Prayer and the Salutations to the Theotokos. "Be deeply humble, and avoid scandal," he replied.

Monk Nikandros the Konstamonitan was once asked, "Even though we daily read the biographies of saints and pious monks and do our rule of prayer, why don't we become like them?" "When a metal worker wants to apply pewter on copper," he answered, "first he must scrape the copper clean and put it through fire. Unless the rust is removed, the pewter does not stick on copper. The same applies to us. We enter a monastery to become monks, but the rust we gathered while in the world comes with us. Thus until it is removed, God's grace does not come to sanctify and make us shine."

The revered Konstamonitan father Modestos would say, "Make a point of not looking for other people's faults."

Frequently the monks on the Holy Mountain say "The way you live saves you, not the place where you live."

"Father Gabriel, I have one desire in my heart, and that is to come to Mount Athos to stay," Father Kyrillos, the respected elder of St. Nicholas Bouratzieri's cell, once said to the ever memorable Karouliotan ascetic.

"Pay attention to what I am going to tell you," he replied. "Indeed, may you come. But since you are now in the world, go to your home, close the door, shut the curtains, fast, read, pray, use your prayer rope — and there you will be on the Holy Mountain."

"When he was speaking, his words were like fire, and his face was waxen and bright." This is the way a contemporary of the blind father Nikiphoros used to tell about him. He lived in the cenobitic monastery of Simonopetra many years ago. Father Nikiphoros prayed the Jesus Prayer unceasingly. He accepted ordination, but only in order to be obedient, and he prayed always to be freed from the awesome responsibility of

priesthood. His prayer was answered, and he was finally delivered, when he lost his sight.

Confessor Father G. fell like a sharp ax on anyone who avoided work or was generally lazy. He advised the fathers to work and imitate the ascetics of old who laboured hard. Some of them made baskets, some would gather bales in the field, some made oil from seeds. Others would climb Athos to gather mountain tea to sell for their livelihood One elder said: "Our salvation is not a matter of chance, but a matter of hard work on our part. 'The kingdom of God comes to those who force themselves' On God-advised and Christ-like Works of Charity

Karouliotan father Christophoros was very strict on himself. He used to slap his own face, for example, to stop himself from falling asleep during vigils. He was charitable to the poor. Each time he met a monk or a lay person he would bow down before him, touching the ground. In just the same way he bowed before beggars, monks, and the faithful alike. "These are Christ's brothers and sisters; they are Christ Himself," he would say.

A venerable monk once said, "Memorial services should be especially given for uncharitable persons after they die. And one should especially give alms in their memory. And again more alms. There are many poor people to help. Give to them In memorial services use plain kolyva, not a sweetened version of it, as is being done so often of late."

The ever memorable Elder Chrysanthos from St. Anne's used to tell us,

Father Nectaries was so charitable that he would have given even the walls of the kalyve of the Holy Forerunner as alms to the hermits and to the Christians who were enslaved by the Turks. Father Nectaries' virtue was known only to Father Azarios, who one day while he was digging in the garden told me- 'Do you know what he does? Each day after vespers he visits the hermits and gives them whatever he has.'

Father Nectarios must have had the premonition that his life would end in martyrdom. He had a compatriot, Elder Kyrillos, who wished to follow his example and died the same death. This is the story of their martyrdom.

At the time of the massacre in Ismirne, the Turks herded all the priests and monks together and confined them in a ravine. (The nuns, having read of prophecies of just such an event, had fled away earlier, crossing to the islands of Chios and Lesvos.) All the captives were afraid of dying except Elder Nectarios, who consoled them all with these words:

"We have abandoned the world since our youth, and now with God's blessing we are given the opportunity to die as martyrs, and we are afraid? Let us repent and confess our sins and we will be freed from this fear of death."

With these words he persuaded them to make their confessions. Thus they regained their composure and bravely ended their lives as martyrs for Christ, killed by Retrial's soldiers. Only one hieromonk was miraculously saved. Once during a vigil at St. Photini of Lissos, he told me exactly what had happened during the massacre and then added:

"You see what charity does to someone? Charity is the crown of all virtues. Because Elder Nectarios had this virtue to the utmost, he had the courage to become a martyr for Christ. »,

The ever memorable Elder X. would tell us: "The well-known father Minas the Mavrovounian was very charitable. All monks in his group ate from one large bowl. At the beginning of the meal he would pretend to be eating, and then after he saw that the others had had enough, he would finish what was left in the bowl. 'Have you had enough?' he would ask.

"'Yes,' would be the answer, without their realizing that he had eaten only one spoonful of food."

Only a few were as charitable as the monk Charalambros from the Dormition kalyve of St. Anne's. This elder's charity surpassed all his other virtues — ceaseless prayer, church attendance, and memory of death. He died in 1945.

Monk Eulogios, whom we have mentioned previously, through his ascesis and virtues had received an abundance of grace and strength from God. He was so famous for his discernment and spirituality that many went to him for advice and guidance in their monastic life, and also to find comfort and to receive his blessing. He had a special concern for the poor, who found affectionate care near him. He constructed a separate building for them, where they could have a permanent shelter from which to offer their voluntary labour, whenever possible, to show their gratitude for his care.

I once met Elder Christodoulos who was under obedience to the great vigilant elder Kallinikos. He received me as a guest in his hermitage in Katounakia which was named for St. Gerasimos. This blessed monk took care of many of the poor by feeding

them and giving them clothing and consolation. He would say: You must take care of strangers so that they will remain pleased. The blessing of lay people is important when they say, 'God bless and forgive you, Father.' To have the virtue of charity is a great thing and God blesses especially those who practice it. Don't hesitate to give always whatever you can. I have tested all this. Any time I receive goods from pious Christians, I share them with others. Are we beasts, to eat everything ourselves? The following incident demonstrates his special virtue. On the day of his funeral, a beggar came with a full knapsack on his back. "May I see Father Christodoulos to ask for a blessing?" he queried.

"Are you looking for charity in these impoverished places?" they asked in reply.

"What do you mean? God bless him for all he has done for me. He gave me money, canned goods, spaghetti, and even clothes! I have been coming here for many years and he knows me."

"But this elder has died," they told him.

"What do you say? God have mercy on his soul for all he has done for me!" And he departed very sad.

Father Christodoulos was a perfect type of simplicity and love, of love in practice, and of charity.

The Romanian ascetic E. had "nowhere to lay his head." He was a helper who served at the meal line in the Russian monastery, and whatever he was given to eat there, he would offer as alms to the hermits who lived in remote areas. "This is my chance to be saved," he would say, "to humble myself by begging, to labour, and to give."

Elder Artemios, when he was serving in the Gregoriatan metochion in Arta, would return empty-handed from his shopping for the monastery, because he gave away all he had to the poor and the elderly.

Whenever Elder Hadjigiorgis received gifts as thanks from persons who were cured through his prayers, he would give them in turn to monks, to the poor, and to lay people. He was so generous that to describe someone who was charitable, people would say, "He gives like a Hadjigiorgis."

Once a monk asked his visitors: "What is your occupation?"

"Elder, our profession is not very good," they replied hesitantly.

"We are merchants."

"My brothers," he said, "these days we are in need of good businessmen. Now, truly tell me what do you do when prices are up on things? Do you sell the old merchandise ; you had in your store with the new prices?"

"Yes, Elder, we do. How can we manage otherwise to bring ' new stock into our store?"

"That is correct! But this way you profit twice. You cannot sell using the old prices, because the other merchants will react to that. But you could use the extra profit you gain, toward deeds of charity," he said.

Small in stature but tall in virtue was Father Antonakis, a hieromonk from New Skete, who was the celebrant priest in St. Anne's metochion of the Taxiarches in New Elvetia, Athens.

Any time he was told of someone poor in his parish, he would go secretly to leave alms at that person's door. He did the same thing as his contemporary Elder Ieronymos the Simonopetritan, and St. Nicholas, the Bishop of Myra in Lycia.

On Compunction and Tears

The ever memorable hegumen of Dionysiou, Archimandrite Gabriel, used to say that the monk Gerontios, who was the typikaris¹ at St. Panteleimon, spent most of his time day and night in the church, with compunction as his constant companion. All of his free time was spent in the narthex, using his left hand to do his prayer | rope and his right to wipe away the tears which were streaming down his face. For this he used a cloth which he would wash in the sea.

He came originally from Kydonia in Asia Minor where | he had killed a Turk who was assaulting a young Christian woman. No one knows whether or not he meant to kill him while he was wrestling with him. Ever since that event, Monk Gerontios had lived in the Russian monastery quietly and peacefully, more harmless than a lamb.

In 1911, on the Friday of the fifth week of Lent, the novice Dionysios (later to become Hegumen Gabriel) was in the Russikon church during Orthros of the Great Canon, which takes place there as a vigil. That mystagogical service remained unforgettable in his heart. He saw, he says, "as in a vision," the venerable elder Gerontios wiping his tears while chanting, "Where can I begin to lament for the deeds of my miserable life?" And when he chanted the ode's last Theotokion, his heart was at such a height of compunction that, lifting his hands towards her holy face with tear-filled eyes and the familiarity of

a son he chanted, "Panagia, the hope of those who pray to you with great emotion: lift the heavy yoke of my sins from me."

When this ever memorable elder started to read the biography of St. Mary of Egypt, Hegumen Gabriel continued, it was a unique and unforgettable scene of fifty or more elder monks, Russian speaking, who were gathered closely together around the typikaris' analogion, some of them kneeling, and others, very old, sitting on the floor with crossed legs, listening without blinking an eye which was focused on the typikaris' lips, not understanding a lot, I thought, but captivated by the reader's compunction and his wonderful manner of reading. As he kept on reading with unsurpassed emotion, the warmth in his voice increased and his inner spiritual contrition became more and more apparent . . . and as he reached that great emotional point of the dialogue between Father Zosimas and St. Maria, the one asking 'tell me, holy woman of God' and her answering Abba Zosimas', the sweet elder was unable to control himself from bursting with emotion. He broke down into uncontrolled sobbing and tears, thus spreading this emotion to the entire congregation.

"You cultivated with your outpouring of tears the barren desert of St. Basil and the Karmilion peak, and you became a luminary, our father Gerasimos." Indeed, hesychastic elder Gerasimos became a champion labourer of tears and a transmitter of light with noetic prayer. For seventeen years he did his ascetic labours on the Karmilion peak of Prophet Elias, west of Kerasia, beneath Athos' peak. It was an heroic existence, battling constantly against nature's elements — wind, thunder and lightning, rain and snow — and against the full guile of demons. He slept in the Lord at the age of ninety.

An elder said: "A heart cleanses itself with a sigh in response to God's grace. We should soak our soul in tears; but one deep, painful sigh is equal to two basketsful of tears."

There were monks who lit the oil lamps in St. Anne's skete, and in the cenobion, who during their sacred obedience before the holy icons had eyes brimming with tears.

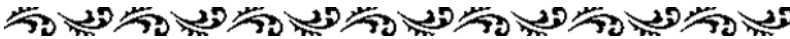
: He came to the Holy Mountain from Cyprus. He was known for his cleansed mind and simple heart. He was graced with tearful prayers and a hesychastic life. He would leave his meal to withdraw into his cell in order to weep. Such was Elder Dionsios of St. Anne's.

The eyes of the Russian hermit Father Tychon were always full of tears. He would wipe them constantly with a wet handkerchief which he carried always in his hand. His stole was usually damp with tears, and the wooden cross he used to bless with, was worn out. He would often say that we ought to wash Jesus' feet with our tears all the days of our lives, and wipe them with our hair while prostrating ourselves before Him. In his own cell, the wooden cross before which he prayed was soaked with his tears.

Father Daniel, the hesychast who lived in St. Peter's G celebrated the liturgy daily for sixty years, using the liturgy of St. Basil in order to experience the service more intensely. He had such compunction that he always soaked the ground with

his tears. And immediately afterwards he would.' draw in solitude so that he might not lose his compunction.

Of strong constitution and called "the Faster," Andreas ascetic from St. Anne had come originally from Epiros was robust and rugged. Full of love, he was always eager help and comfort those who were climbing up the hill carrying a heavy load from the shore to the monastery 'scrub; He lacked formal education, but he has God's wisdom; he was granted the gift of pure, ceaseless prayer. He prayed continually to the Theotokos, shedding rivers compunction ate tears, full of heavenly love.



On Vigils

When the righteous Akakios, who did his asceticism in a desolate skete of Kafsokalyvia, was asked to speak on sleep and vigil, he replied: "Half an hour of sleep is enough for a true monk!" He himself either stood up all night long or knelt, praying and chanting with great courage, in spite of the fact that he suffered from a hernia and was very old. He would sleep very little in the mornings, sometimes leaning on his arm or on anything else, long enough not to lose clarity of mind from extreme sleeplessness. He viewed sleep as a treacherous and undermining enemy of the soul. He said that nothing increases sinful desires more than excessive sleep. And nothing subdues them as much as sleeplessness.

He made a bed with thick, knotted tree branches nailed sparsely together, without a mattress, so that he could not rest his body as well as it would have liked, and so that he could be awakened easily. According to his biography, he slept no more than four hours a day.

Even the blessed St. Gregory Palamas had an ongoing battle against the flesh and sleep. For three whole months in his hermitage above the holy monastery of Lavra he remained sleepless and in prayer. He did, however, then interrupt this ascetic labour so that his mind might not be harmed by too extended a vigil.

The Athonite Russian, St. Silouanos the New, who was canonized in 1987, was born in 1866 and died in 1938. He was a monk of St. Panteleimon's Monastery. He lived a righteous and pure life of universal love, unceasing prayer, and humility. His life came to a peaceful end in peace, and he left behind the memory of a holy man. His biography was written by Archimandrite Sophronios, the hegumen of the Holy Patriarchal and Stavropegic Monastery of the Honoured Forerunner in England.

St. Silouanos among his many virtues laboured especially for sleeplessness, as he knew from experience how much it contributes to attaining cleansing of mind, uplifting in prayer and cultivation of joyful mourning. He would not lie on a bed to sleep; instead he would spend the entire night praying, either standing up or sitting on a stool. He would sleep for only fifteen to twenty minutes and then rise again to pray. He would rest again later, intermittently. His entire sleep in twenty-four hours would total only two hours.

We asked the blind elder Simeon the Kafsokalyvitan: "How can the soul be cleansed from impure thoughts, desires and other passions?" and he replied: "By not knowing what it is like to get any sleep."

In an Iviritan skete there lived a most pious hieromonk, Gerasimos the Hymnographer. When he was to celebrate the Divine Liturgy the next day, he would stay awake all night long

in reading and in prayer. God took him away at a young age. His brief life had been very full, for he had pleased the Lord. A struggling hermit said: "By sleeping a lot, our mind becomes opaque."

Hadjigiorgis rested standing up at his bench in the church all night long. He hardly knew his cell. He devoted his entire days to his suffering brothers and his nights to prayer.

One day a young monk asked Father N., who was 86 years old: "Elder, how many hours should a monk sleep?"

"Listen, my brother: St. Theodore the Studite and St. Simeon the New Theologian say that four to five hours a day should be enough sleep. But Abba Arsenics in the Gerontikon declares that for a labouring monk, one hour of sleep should be sufficient. St. Akakios the Kafsokalyvitan used to say that 'I find half an hour of sleep not enough, but if the saint says so ... we should try it'."

"And you, how long do you rest?"

"My brother, what is the need for such a question?"

"For my benefit and for the love of Christ, tell me."

"I'll tell you. One hour in twenty-four is enough."

"Do you sleep one hour through or with interruptions?"

"With interruptions of course! A quarter of an hour, here or there."

"And how is your time spent?"

"Unfortunately, now that I have a double hernia, I do not stand to read the Psalter or the Gospels and to say the Jesus Prayer."

"The entire Psalter and New Testament?"

"Naturally, the entire ones."

"Every day?"

"Every day, every day. The only thing is, I cannot read standing up any more. That is what happens with old age."

An elder said: "Sleep should become a servant, not a master. "

An Agioritan conclusion:

It is not possible for a spiritual life to exist without vigil. According to his contemporaries, Elder Artemios the Gregoriatan never sat down on his chair during any service, including the all-night vigils. Until his death, he remained an upstanding steadfast pillar of the Church and of prayer.



On Unknown Saints and Hermits

In the kyriakon of Kafsokalyvia there is a mural of an unknown saint with the inscription "Sanctified Euphrosynos of the monastery of Iviron who has passed away." On his right hand he is holding an unfolded scroll which is inscribed "Having a simple heart and living amidst turmoil, he has slept in the Lord." He is wearing a monk's tunic, kneeling in prayer.

The biographer of St. Akakios, the Kafsokalyvitan Father Jonas, at the end of his works writes about the holy martyrs' contemporary with St. Akakios: "These martyrs are like precious jewels, departed to the Lord." Such was the blessed Euphrosynos, who shone like another sun in the holy monastery of Iviron. Because he had a simple manner and was clairvoyant, he would speak figuratively and be capable of revealing anyone's hidden inner state of being.

His relics were not found in the tomb on the day set aside for their translation. And still living on Mount Athos are monks like him.

The elder Germanos, who did his ascetic labours near a Romanian elder in Chairi, one night dreamed of three worthy elders who said to him: "Be careful, we three are staying here. Do not disturb us, and tell the others not to bother us either. "

Father Germanos told this revelation to his famous spiritual father, Neophytos the Karamanlian who laboured on the Karmelion mountain, on a peak west of Kerasia in St. Basil's desert. Father Neophytus searched persistently with great zeal and desire in all the caves and deserted hermitages of the area, but could not find the holy relics of the hermits. Soon after, the three deceased ascetics revealed themselves to the Romanian elder like this:

Once as he was going toward St. Neilos' cell to receive Holy Communion, he smelled a holy fragrance, as many other fathers had previously done (including the present writer, unworthy and least of all as he is). This particular time, however, the pious ascetic Father Neophytos had the very strongest sense of the fragrance. So he decided to search for its source and prayed to the saints to show him where their holy relics lay; There was a ledge at that location. As he put aside the rocks with which the ledge was built, behind the pile of stones he saw a cave opening. It was from this place that the fragrance of myrrh was coming. He attempted to enter the cave, but was startled by a voice which said: "Do not disturb us. We are three. We used to live here. We do not wish anyone to disturb us."

The kind and pious elder blocked the opening of the cave and left praising God and those obscure saints, rare desert lilies of the Holy Mountain. He revealed the opening of the cave only to his disciple Ilarion.

The Romanian elder Gerasimos, who recounted this story, lived on Mount Athos for forty years.

Many years ago in the hut below the central church of Kafsokalyvia, a novice from Bulgaria named Lakovos was in training under obedience to a very strict Greek elder. Lakovos wished to lead a greater ascetic life, and for this reason would

come at night to the narthex of the church to pray beneath the icon of the Holy Trinity.

One night during a full moon, while he was praying, he heard the footsteps of a man. He carefully hid himself. Then he saw the man entering the narthex, naked and with long white hair and a very long beard. The man blessed the door of the church, which had opened by itself, with the sign of the cross. He went into the church, venerated the icons, and then exited, blessing the door again with the sign of the cross as it shut itself by divine power. Then he began to go uphill, taking the path from the skete toward Kerasia.

The novice Lakovos, overwhelmed with admiration and curiosity, followed this unknown hermit quietly step by step. Soon they reached the location of the Cross, made a right turn, and followed one behind the other, taking the path leading to the top of Athos. When the hermit reached the church of Panagia, the novice quickened his step and jumped in front of him, making a prostration and pleading with him to receive him under obedience "You cannot stay here, my son," the unknown hermit replied. Lakovos insisted, wetting the ground with his tears.

"Return to your elder, be obedient, and you will be saved. No one can endure this place without having divine grace, and you should also know that you will soon die." Lakovos went back, told his elder all that had happened, went to his confessor, prepared himself for his departure, and three weeks later fell asleep in the Lord.

It has been said that during the translation of his relics, a fragrance was sensed coming from them.

It was fifty years ago when the following event took place. A

devout pilgrim from Crete started out to visit Mount Athos to see his cousin, Father Euthymios, a hesychast who lived in a hut situated at the southern end of the monastery of Little St. Anne's. From the dock of St. Anne's, he started walking through unfamiliar paths, rocky cliffs and ravines until he reached the location called Hunger (Pena). There was a dead end. He was forced to continue by climbing up until finally, with great difficulty, he reached the hesychasts' place of the Archangels, the location where the Cretan Agapios Landos wrote The Salvation of Sinners. From that point, he reached his relative's hut.

When he had caught his breath, and after such an adventure was received with hospitality, he said to Father Euthymios: "Cousin, tell me when you are going to bury the body I saw up there on the cliffs in a cave? I would like to witness how a burial is done on Mount Athos."

When Father Euthymios heard about the dead man in the cave he, along with his cousin and the elder Kyprianos the Goldsmith, started to search the entire area inch by inch; but they did not find anything. Only around sunset did they smell a fragrance of incense coming from the direction of the cliffs, an aroma which Father Kyprianos had smelled before.

In the meantime, the pilgrim told his story: "Next to this tree was the cave. I entered, and there on his death bed a reverend elder was sleeping. In the beginning I did not realize that he was dead. Then I came closer and saw that he had a cross on his head; next to him was an icon of the Mother of God and a lit lamp. I crossed myself, bowed three times and smelled incense. I left thinking that you had no time to bury him that day." In the year 1977-78 the dikaios of the St. Anne's Skete was Monk Kyrillos. During the month of September, he received as

a guest a Lebanese Orthodox Christian, a refugee to Greece because of the war in Lebanon

This devout Lebanese had a strong desire to climb to the top of Athos. So early in the morning, with directions given by the dikaios, he began his long and exhausting ascent. On the same day during the evening, he returned to the skete's kyriakon. The following day after the Divine Liturgy, he was able with the little Greek he knew to relate the following marvellous incident: In the location known as Babylla, below the mountain peak where the great slope begins, he stopped to rest for a moment and then continued climbing. While he was searching for a place to rest, suddenly he saw in front of him a house out of which two venerable hermits came. As soon as they saw him, they welcomed him and gave him fresh figs, which had a flavour and sweetness that he found impossible to describe, and cool water. His fatigue disappeared completely.

He also saw ten more respectable monks in the hut, each of whom was leaning on a curved "lazy stick" and praying with a prayer rope. They replied to his questions that they had been living there for a long time and did nothing else but pray for the entire world.

All these things and more filled the pilgrim with astonishment and admiration. He said that they were all of the same age. When the dikaios and the others heard, they were surprised and gave praise to God for his wonders through his saints.

In the area between the Great Lavra and Kafsokalyvia, a long time ago there lived an aged monk named Panaretos. At one time he decided to start a garden in front of his hut in order both to get some exercise and to receive comfort in the inconsolable desert from the supply of garden vegetables.

After toiling and sweating for many days, digging that rocky spot, he hit a flat stone. He lifted it with great effort and there he saw a tomb with a body in it, dressed in the holy robes of a priest, as if it had been buried yesterday. This body was emitting a wonderful fragrance. Father Panaretos had been an ascetic there for over fifty years, but he had never heard about the life or death of any famous solitary like the one in the tomb.

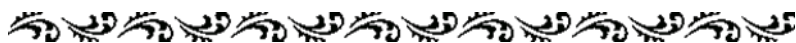
After his first shock, he began to cry, praying: "Saint of God, reveal to me who you are and how many years you have lived in this desolate place. I thank you for revealing your sainthood to me, the unworthy."

Father Panaretos, devout elder that he was, remained awake all night long, praying and contemplating, because he planned to report his finding to the holy monastery of Great Lavra. Early in the morning, though, after he fell asleep, he dreamed of the unknown saint who spoke to him sternly:

"What are you contemplating doing, Abba?" "Saint of God, I thought to notify the monastery of Lavra to come and take you, for you are forgotten and neglected here" he replied, stricken with terror.

"We did not do our ascetic labours together, so why are you transferring my body? I strived here for more than fifty years. Put me back, please. Place the tombstone on the grave and you will not reveal anything to anyone during your lifetime."

Elder Panaretos woke up, covered the tomb, and felt better. He always prayed to this unknown saint. After he became quite old and came to live in Kafsokalyvia, just before his passing, he told the fathers what had happened without revealing the location or other details.



On Evil Spirits

Just as the holy Athanasios began building the monastery's I main church, which is still preserved in our time, Satan launched a terrible attack by tempting the construction workers with an immense difficulty. While the foremen and the workers were drafting the plan for the temple, suddenly everyone's hands became paralysed. They could not even bring them to their mouths. So St. Athanasios read the Trisagion Hymn, and immediately their hands returned to normal. The saint himself began first to dig the ground then he ordered the others to do the same. Straight way they began the work without any problem. They were astonished by the miracle and with no hesitation fell on their knees before the holy Athanasios and begged him to allow them to stay near him so that they too could become monks. Thus Satan departed in shame, for he had failed to stop the building of the monastery which was to become the first bastion of Orthodoxy and asceticism on the Holy Mountain, Panagia's garden.

Two weeks after the holy Peter of Athos settled into his cave, Satan launched immense temptations, sending out an I alert and general mobilisation of all demons, in order to attack this heroic pioneer of asceticism.

But St. Peter became a laurel-victor over the attacks. During the night the father of lies and envy gathered together all his soldiers, some of whom attacked the cave by throwing javelins and arrows against it, while others broke huge rocks from above and threw them down as they screamed, "Come out of our house. Otherwise we will kill you."

Being strengthened by prayer, the saint remained unharmed by their threats and attacks. Coming out of the cave' for a short time

he saw a multitude of demons. Raising his \ eyes to heaven he cried out from the depths of his heart, 'All holy Theotokos help me, your servant!'

At the sound of the Mother of God's name those cowardly demons disappeared. Fifty days passed before they came back in the form of beasts and snakes, the same way! as they had attacked that great teacher of the desert St.' Antonios. And again the saint defended himself by making the sign of the holy cross and calling upon the holy name of Jesus the Saviour.

Following this, the always innovative and conniving enemy tried to trick the saint in this manner: he took on the form of a young relative and appeared before the holy Peter, acting joyous and emotional about meeting him again after ~such a long time, telling him all about his relatives' sadness. and worry over his shipwreck as revealed to them by St. Nicholas, who had also, the demon claimed, told them that their rare, beloved treasure (Peter) was hiding in the forests of Athos.

"So come," he said, "let us go together back to your friends and relatives who are waiting for you. You will find another i monastery, for there are many of them. Tell me how you lean serve God better—when you depart from the world or when you stay for the benefit of souls? Why should you stay out here in these desolate mountainous heights instead of being with the people who are waiting for you to teach them? Don't you remember the prophet's saying, "The one who takes worthy things out of the unworthy is like my mouth."

The saint heard these words and was disturbed. This was • a sign that the youth speaking to him was not from God. He bowed his head and with tears in his eyes bravely replied: "Know this well, that no one brought me to this place, neither man nor angel, but God and the all holy Theotokos. Unless it is their will, I cannot depart from this place."

At the sound of the Theotokos' name, this apparition of his relative, in reality a wily demon, disappeared

Seven years later, the third demonic attack against this brave commander of Athonite asceticism occurred when Satan appeared to him as an angel. This "angel" stood at the entrance of the saint's cave with an unsheathed sword and cried out, "Come out, true servant of Christ, come to hear about the mysteries of God and things that will benefit your soul."

"And who are you who wants to tell me things that will be for the good of my soul?" the saint asked.

"I am the archangel of God, Who sends me to bring you good tidings. Be brave, have courage and rejoice, because a throne has been prepared for you and a crown of blossoms made for you which will last forever. It is now the time that you should leave this place to go to the world so that many souls will benefit. Besides, that is why the Lord let this water spring you drank from be dried up, for He wishes to send you away. "

"Who am I, the most unworthy of all, that an angel of my Lord has come to me?" answered the saint.

"Do not wonder," the false angel assured him. "For you have surpassed all ancient saints and prophets, such as Moses, Elijah, Daniel and Job. Go and preach to the world. God orders you so that many may benefit."

"Unless my Lady Theotokos, who has brought me here, my helper — as well as St. Nicholas — will this, I am not leaving this place."

Again, at the sound of the Theotokos' name, the demon vanished instantly.

That same night the Lady Theotokos, the protector and overseer of Mount Athos, and St. Nicholas — the two holy visitors — came to him after he had faced such great temptations, and said, "Peter, do not be afraid of the devil's winning ways. You must know that the Lord is with you. Starting tomorrow morning, you will be fed with heavenly food."

"The evil spirit of delusion," St. Maximos the Kafsokalyvitan said to St. Gregory the Sinaitan, when it comes to a man confuses his mind and makes him crazy. It hardens his heart. It causes a person to be cowardly, to be fearful, to despair and to be full of arrogance. It makes the eyes of the person wild, disturbs the mind, causes shivers to go through the body. Light appears, not bright but reddish. The mind becomes demonic. The evil spirit encourages the individual to blaspheme. Anyone who is possessed by such a demonic spirit is angered and becomes mad. There is neither humility nor true mourning and tears in him. He boasts of all his accomplishments and seeks to be glorified and honoured. He indulges his passions. He loses his mind and is totally destroyed.

St. Nikodemos the Agioritan was attacked many times in various ways by evil spirits, either directly by them or through men. Here is what his biographer, the monk Euthymios, wrote describing an attack by the evil spirits with the purpose of disturbing and scaring the saint:

Do not think that he achieved all these . . . without envy and temptations from invisible and visible enemies. As far as the visible ones are concerned, it is best to forget them and to leave them to God's mercy ..

The blessed Nikodemos, when he first arrived [on Mount Athos] was such a coward that he would leave the door of his cell open before he went to sleep, for he felt comforted knowing other people were around, or so he thought.

But when he went to the desert he became so brave that any time he was up all night writing and the demons were outside his cell window whispering, he kept on working, fearlessly. Sometimes

he would even laugh at their tricks.

One night on the island of Skyropoulas where he was staying, the demons created such a loud banging that he thought for a moment that the wall of the cell would give way. But the next morning everything was in place. The same thing happened while he was in a group of kalyves. There he tried hard to hear what the demons were saying, but he could not hear a thing. Only once he heard them saying 'He who writes.'

At another time they were knocking at his cell's door. Each time they knocked twice. One time when he was trans- kiting the thirty-fourth Psalm, at the line where it says, 'The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them,' they created such a noise that it appeared as if a whole army were marching over his hut with great force. And indeed a stone wall near his cell actually did crumble during this attack.

During the year 1925 a man possessed by the devil came to the monastery of St. Dionysios. In his room after Vespers 1 he started singing loudly and dancing in a frenzy, pounding! his feet on the floor until he collapsed. The fathers had to tie his hands and feet together to force him to rest. But he would free himself as if they had tied him with only a thread.' One day an experienced monk tied him down with a new I rope. At the same time, the demon who was in the man was; screaming, "Monk, tie me up and I will show you where this rope will go." And indeed two hours later the possessed man was freed and the rope was found in the garden.

Another day, after the man's exhausting dance, Elder Vissarion ran to him with a pitcher full of water to offer him a drink. To this water the elder had added some holy water. "Come John, my child," he said to him, "come and have some cold water." Because he was out of breath and very thirsty, the possessed

man began to drink. But after only a few moments he felt burning on his throat and said, "Monk, you have burned me," and screamed and spat the water out of his mouth.

What a miracle! Everyone marvelled at the divine energy that holy water has. After that he was offered ordinary water, which he drank with great relish.

They read exorcism prayers for a month, and after he was freed from the evil spirit, he left the monastery. Once they had asked the demon, "Of what are you most afraid?

The holy water, the antidoron, or the Holy Communion?" To which the demon replied, "If you could only keep the Holy Communion you receive in Church, none of us could harm you."

"John, why are you afraid of the Holy Communion?" "Do not ask John; leave him alone. Listen to me and what I have to say: John is not the one who is talking to you. Untie me so that I can dive into the sea, and soon I will be in Athens!"

A novice in the Iviritan skete of John the Forerunner and from Joseph's hut, though he was receiving Holy Communion frequently, saw demons. A wild cat would appear in his window ready to attack him. He realised that the appearances were demonic. The elders questioned him as to whether he had not confessed a sin, and he then admitted that he had hesitated to tell that he had killed someone unintentionally when he had lived in his village. He did not tell about it from fear that he would be charged with murder and sent to be tried in court. As soon as he confessed it, the demonic appearances ceased.

One evening the cell of St. Silouanos the Athonite was filled I with a peculiar light. It went through his whole body so that he became transparent and he was able to see everything within his chest cavity. A thought came to him to accept this as God's grace. But this was disturbing, and he kept wondering why there was no feeling of contrition in him. He even burst into laughter as he prayed. He knocked! his forehead with his fist. He stopped laughing, but his compunction did not return, nor did any sense of repentance.] Then he realised that the vision was not from God. Shortly] afterwards, he saw evil spirits in front of him, and he conversed with them as if they were human beings. They told him, "Now you are a saint," or "you will never be saved." When he asked them why they were telling him contradictory things, they replied: "We never tell the truth."

An elder said, "Even on Mount Athos the devil finds a way to catch us He has also managed to take in the young ' people. Even in a Christian family they can lose the meaning of what family is. Everywhere it is the same way. The monasteries try to do things right, but . . ."

An elder said to a beginner monk, "The devil has one target: to take you away from your 'nest' (that is, your company of monks). When he succeeds in that, the rest is easy. "Don't let your trust and love in your elder be diminished. Because if you do, it will stop you from continuing your struggle and you will be defeated. Always remember these two passwords: 'Bless' and 'forgive.' When you are reprimanded, say 'Let it be blessed.' When you are given an order, always think

'He that orders is also responsible.' This way you will remain a carefree, quiet and sensible, obedient monk."

Ascetic Nikodemos from Kafsokalyvia (1807-1867) struggled greatly. He fed only on bread and never ate any vegetables. The devil, who is full of envy and the enemy of all good people, set many traps for him. He would present him with illusions and bright appearances, but Nikodemos would always come out a victor in the struggle, because he had an experienced spiritual father to guide him.

Once he was snowbound in his cell for so long that he used up all his dry bread and had no more food. Then the evil spirit appeared to him as the Holy Trinity in bright light and said: "I am the Holy Trinity, bow before me and you will be filled with grace, and you will get some food." At the same time tables covered with many appetizing foods appeared before the monk, giving off aromas which tempted him.

The athlete of Christ Nikodemos knelt down and begged the Lord to deliver him from this temptation.

A pious ascetic lived in the skete of Kafsokalyvia. One time he heard a knock at his door. It was someone dressed as a monk with a knapsack on his back full of the toasted bread which all ascetics eat. "Who are you?" asked the pious elder.

"I am a father confessor from St. Anne's."

"If you are a monk, especially a spiritual father, make a prostration."

As soon as the stranger heard this he disappeared (for he was a demon), and left behind a trail of bad odour which lasted for

three days. We should mention here that the evil spirits do not make prostrations nor venerate God.

An elder used to say, 'A monk resembles a small, squirming fish. He knows how to escape the world like the little fish that avoids the bait hidden in the deadly hook.'

Ever memorable Elder Gabriel, the "grandfather," the hegumen of Dionysiou, often told this story:

In 1910 through God's grace I, the least of all, came here to this holy place to become a monk. What I am going to tell you had just happened not long before I arrived. I asked about it and everybody told me the same thing, since it was an original and rare event. This is what I was told: Four years before, there was a person gentle in appearance who had come here from Thessaloniki. He was a pastry maker, the only son to his parents, and he had come to the Holy Mountain to become a monastic. His name was Athanasios.

Soon after he became a novice, he was sent to our metochion 'Monoxilitis,' which is situated in the interior of Mount Athos, as it was customary to work there and also to be taught how to fast and follow all the services. In this way he would be prepared for the strict asceticism practiced in our monastery.

One day, after he had arrived there, soon after all the brothers had come from the church and were getting ready to start their work and while they were still standing on the balcony of the metochion, stones were thrown at them, coming from the direction of the nearby forest. No one was harmed by this, nor were any buildings or furnishings damaged.

At first they thought that people were throwing the stones at

them for a joke, but as they proceeded to go to work, they realized that the barrage was continuing. It was then that they all ran back to the metochion, frightened and suspecting foul play from either people or demons. They went into the church and prayed to God and to the Theotokos to save them.

While they were in the church, the attack stopped, but as soon as they came outside, the stones began flying at them again. To add to this demonic confusion, their dog was suddenly thrown three metres down from the balcony by an invisible power. Also tossed about were many unbreakable objects such as wooden stools, monks' hats, and so forth, all of which appeared to be moving about by themselves and falling off the balcony.

The frightened monks stayed gathered around the very pious Father Markos, a previous hegumen, and spent most of their time in the church, knowing that all this was a demonic attack. To make sure for the last time that this was truly the case, the chief steward of the monastery, Porphyries, sent one of the monks out to Karyes on foot in order to ask for assistance from the local guard, which they required as ordered by the overseers. When the guards arrived, the stones were still coming from the direction of the forest. The guardsmen searched the area and even fired several shots, but with no results. They agreed that demons were attacking, and departed.

Finally novice Athanasios, who was mentioned earlier, told the fathers that the attack was directed at him because of his parents' and his involvement with magic in his previous sinful life. He said that for two days now he had experienced an oppressive feeling, and to convince the fathers that what he was saying was true, he asked them to let him go to the small church of St.

Artemios which was not far from the metochion. As soon as he began to walk away in that direction, the stones all began falling on him and around him without doing him any harm.

After this the other monks left Athanasios to stand alone in the church while they went about their usual business. The chief

steward then wrote to the main monastery, explaining what had happened and asking them to send a boat to take the novice back so that everyone else in the metochion would be freed from this demonic disturbance. The request was granted, but as soon as Athanasios began to go toward the shore to enter the boat which had been sent for him, the attack began again. In order to console the boatmen, the steward had to send along with them both Father Markos and the most holy monk Isaak. In spite of this, stones continued to fall until they were well out to the sea. Fortunately they fell all around the boat without harming anyone.

Under these circumstances they arrived at the monastery. At first, because no stones fell upon their arrival or as they were making their way up to the monastery, some monks started making fun of them, saying that they were suffering from delusions. Suddenly five or six very large rocks fell from the nearby tower, which convinced everyone that this was no laughing matter after all, but a serious problem.

The monastery's synod decided to send the novice to the spiritual father Savvas, a former member of their community who was now at St. Anne's, hoping that he would be able to look after him. The next day they took him there.

This great ascetic, though very old, felt profound compassion for the suffering novice. He fasted totally and prayed for an entire week. As a result, he and his whole company of monks suffered greatly, for not only were they attacked with huge rocks which fell from above their hut into the sea below with a terrible thundering, but also because the seemingly quiet Athanasios would become violent and blasphemous, and would attack the other monks verbally, especially the spiritual father Savvas. At one point they even had to tie him down so that he would not kill himself. Finally, the prayer of the just man won over the evil. While the most pious spiritual father was praying with tears in his eyes, admonishing the devil to leave the novice, he saw a

demon in the shape of a fox exit through the novice's mouth. It stood at the hut's entrance and stared at the elder angrily, grinding its teeth. Then it disappeared. Immediately the novice fell on his knees before the elder, weeping and thanking him, telling him that he had been freed and saved from an unbearable burden.

The elder kept the novice near him for a few days, then sent him to another spiritual father in Koutlounousiou's skete, where he was tonsured a monk with the name of Avvakoum. I met Avvakoum in Karyes, where he used his skill as a pastry maker to earn what was necessary to live. His co-ascetics reported that he was a strict ascetic, wearing chains under his clothing, following the old father's example. Attaining to a very old age, and not being able to take care of himself, he returned to the main monastery of Koutlounousiou and there near the monastery stable, in a small hut, fell asleep in the Lord a few years ago.

Father Simeon went to live in the same cave near Small St. Anne's in which Father Joseph the Hesychast had formerly lived with his subordinates. One day a young man who had just arrived on Athos, hoping to become a monk, came to visit him. The elder was pleased to see him and expressed his happiness that so many young men were now coming to the mountain to become monastics, following the example of the elders. "My brother," he said to him, "no matter what, never keep your thoughts hidden from your spiritual father. Trust him totally, otherwise you will be in danger, as I once found out myself. " "What happened?" asked the young man.

"After I left the world and became a rasophore,¹ I wanted to be a hesychast right away to live quietly in prayer as did the great fathers. Thus I came to this place, small and where there is no water, contrary to the advice of many elders and especially of

my spiritual father M. Seeing that I was insisting, he finally said to me, "Go, since you are insisting. But you should come back to see me, to tell me your thoughts!

Our cells were only a twenty minutes' walk apart. Of day after I had finished my rule of prayer and as I was sitting on my wooden bed, I heard women's laughter and talking. Shortly after, I saw four young women looking at through my window. I became anxious. "Where am I thought?' In Piraeus or Mount Athos?"

They started laughing in a teasing way. The first one said "That one is very handsome!"

"What a fool he is," said the second one; "he came here to be a monk. I would like to marry him."

The third one interrupted her, saying "No! I will marry him. You are ugly."

"You are wasting your time," the fourth one said, "because he will die in forty days before he receives the Great Schema."

Then they disappeared. At these seemingly prophetic words, I started to worry and lament for my forthcoming death. But still I did not go and tell this incident to my confessor.

The fortieth day came. I was anxiously waiting for the twelfth hour at midnight and began to cry out in pain, "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me! Forgive me, my Lord. There is no time for me to receive the Great Schema" The midnight hour struck, and I thought death was coming.

But nothing happened. I pinched myself to see if I was still alive. Then I realized I had been duped. Quickly I got up and ran to my spiritual father.

An elder said: "The devil does not respect anyone, whether a priest, a bishop, or a patriarch."

An ascetic told me this about the evil spirits' actions. Once while he was in his hermitage praying, suddenly a bright light shone in front of him. He paid no attention to it and continued praying more intensely. Then two demons appeared in the shape of gypsies playing at hitting each other. This happened so suddenly that the ascetic could not help himself— he burst out laughing at them.

The evil spirits use all kinds of deceptions. Sometimes they create bold images, or they change themselves to appear as angels of light. This is the way they appeared before a contemporary ascetic while he was praying: it was at night, and he heard loud voices, drums playing, and dancing. He got up to see what was going on. He saw nothing. It was the devil. He had barely sat down on his stool again to continue his prayer when suddenly his room was filled with light. The roof of his cell was lifted up. He thought the light was reaching the sky. Where the light came to an end there appeared the face of a man, like Christ's. He could see only half of the face, but as he stared at it he heard an inner voice saying "You have been honoured to see Christ!"

His automatic response was the thought "Who am I, the unworthy, to see Christ?" and he crossed himself. Immediately the apparition disappeared, and the cell's roof fell back in place.

"When the Holy Spirit dwells in a person, his thoughts are collected within him," St. Maximos the Kafsokalyvit would say to St. Gregory the Sinaitan. "That person," continued, then is careful and humble. He remembers death, his sins, the

final judgment, and eternal hell. He becomes sensitive to holy things. His eyes are filled with tears and tranquillity. The more God's grace comes to him, the more his mind is at rest, and his soul is consoled by Christ's passion and His immense love for mankind. The mind in this state then enters the realm of true visions and comprehends the inconceivable power of God, Who by only one word brought the universe from non-existence into being. At the same time his mind is both in awe of God's omnipotence, through which He governs everything, and overwhelmed at the incomprehensibility of the Holy Trinity and at the immensity of the Divine Sacrifice. At such a time his mind is 'lifted up above all material senses, is illumined and filled' with divine knowledge. Within this luminous divine light, his heart grows calm and serene, full of the fruits of the Holy Spirit: joy, peace, tolerance, goodness, affection, love, humility, and many more. Then it is that a man's soul is in absolute bliss.

A well-known contemporary hermit told us this:

When a man receives the divine grace in abundance, he cannot take it all in at once. He is shaken up by it, as if an electric current had passed through his body. He cannot endure such divine grace. Then there are tears, bliss, inexpressible joy, transformation, and divine love.

All night long I had the holy relics of St. Arsenics on my bed and I was praying. Suddenly the devil appeared. He grabbed me and threw me on the ground, screaming "What is this skull?" Then I cried, "Saint of God, help me!" The devil disappeared and I was filled with an ineffable joy.

When in the morning someone came to visit me, he was surprised at how my face was transformed by the presence of divine grace.

On Gratitude and Good Thoughts

A discerning elder and guide said: "At one time an acquaintance of mine came to see me in a miserable state. He had built a house in what had been a very quiet town. Soon afterwards some people opened a garage next to his house. Then further down a highway was built. Next a nightclub opened across the street. Soon the man could not sleep at all."

"'What can I do, Father?' he asked me. 'Am I supposed to build another house? How can I? [He had five children.] It is not easy to build another house. What should we do? There is no rest for us there now.' Such was the problem for them that the whole family were on tranquillizers.

"'Listen, Blessed One,' I told him. 'You are not facing the problem spiritually. Let us suppose that a war started there and I told you that if you stay in this house, I would guarantee that nothing would happen to you: if you wanted to go outside, no one would bother you, and not even one bomb would fall on your house. What would you say to this? Probably that this would be the greatest blessing under the circumstances. And you would say "What a blessing this is, my Lord! The whole world is being destroyed and I am being guaranteed my life".'

"'Of course you would consider this a great blessing. Now have another positive thought, this time about your current situation, and say "Thanks be to God! At least there are no heavy armoured tanks going by here . . . we see only some cars . . . not armoured convoys. Some people are going about taking care of their business. There is no war! What a blessing! Thanks be to God!".'

"'Give thanks always. For if we do not think positively, and be peaceful within, we should not fool ourselves that if we went to a quiet spot we would then be at peace. Even there the temptations would gather like jackals around to howl at night. In fact, actual jackals might gather. For we will always have

temptations. In the daytime, for example, if we have a tree in our quiet spot, cicadas will gather. Then these temptations would mislead us to use a stick to disperse the insects or stones to disperse the jackals!

'We should always face every situation with good thoughts!'

An elder said, "Once I was on a bus. What a situation! Somebody asked the driver to lower the radio. 'We have a priest among us,' he said (for they had noticed me). The driver put the sound higher. I was saying the Jesus Prayer. The person who had spoken wanted to help me, but I said 'It doesn't bother me,' for I was thinking: if, God forbid, there were an accident and they brought all the people out of the bus — one having a broken leg, another an injured head, another crying, and perhaps even a little child hurt-how could I endure such a sight? 'Thanks be to God,' I said to myself; 'everyone here is well and they can even sing!'

"Thus there noise became the foundation tone for my prayer. They behaved the way they wanted, and I did just fine.

"There is no other way but to face all situations with a positive attitude, and to try to put yourself in the other person's place. Instead so often we try to have our own way, and the world becomes a madhouse.

"When a person puts himself in another's place, things fall in order. Take for example an old woman and her daughter-in-law. The younger woman should try to put herself in the elderly one's place and say to herself, 'How would I want to be treated? When I am an old, drooling woman j would I want my grandchildren making fun of me? And my daughter-in-law snapping at me? Would I like that? So how should I behave toward my mother-in-law?'

"You should know also that if someone does not behave in a

spiritual way, then the spiritual laws will be in effect, You will have to pay for everything. God will allow it, because of His love, for us to pay for everything in this life."

An ascetic would say: "Trust God and your elders. Be obedient when they ask you to do this or that, and you will be at] rest. All this time that you have trusted yourself, what have you gained? Self-confidence is a great obstacle to divine grace. I "Do not trust your reasoning. Have simple thoughts, and! God for your humility will protect you, and you will experience His joy and peace. Our spiritual progress depends upon! us. Unless we do things right, neither the great Antonios nor the great Varsanouphrios can save us. God is obliged to s when we totally trust in Him.

'Anyone who has good thoughts is spiritually healthy. "During the years of the German occupation, small children in the villages lived on cornbread and their cheeks were rosy, for no matter what they ate, it turned to blood. In contrast, with the children of rich people, even though they ate good bread and butter with marmalade, still they were pale and sick. It is the same with spiritual things. If we think simply and with purity, with no evil, then we will be spiritually health."

An elder said: "Let us build a factory of good thoughts. If a factory produces bullets and we feed it with iron, it will make bullets. If the factory makes chalices and we feed it with gold, it will produce gold chalices. If we feed it with iron, it will make chalices of iron. Whatever thoughts we put in our minds, that is what we will get. "

An elder said: "Sorrows cleanse and polish a person. There is nothing greater than that, even the Jesus Prayer is not greater. The late Father Tychon used to say that 'The prayer "Lord Jesus have mercy on us" is worth one hundred drachmas, but "Glory to God" is worth one thousand.' By this he meant that glorifying God is more valuable than anything else, because in the first instance, people often say the Jesus Prayer when needing something; but when one glorifies God in the midst of suffering, it is an asceticism."

An Agioritan ascetic who unceasingly praised God would say, We are all sinners. We should face our sinfulness. We ought to think: what has God done for us? And what are we doing for God? Thinking this way will break even a heart made of granite. Just think: God could have made me a mule so that I would be loaded down with 150 kilos of wood by someone with no consideration, and be hit on the head by some villager. And I would finally end my days by falling in a ditch, to be eaten by dogs, and passersby would hold their noses for the bad odour that my carcass would give off. Have I thanked God just for what I am? No, I have not thanked Him. He could have made me a snake or a scorpion. But God in His love made me a man. He sacrificed Himself for me. With only one drop of divine blood He cleansed the whole human race.

He also said,
A school teacher had five or six children. He was not quite fifty years old. One of his daughters had something wrong with one of her eyes. They operated and found a tumour and had to

remove the eye. All the children at school made fun of the poor little girl. How could this child be consoled, I thought to myself? Since she was only twelve years old, she would be able to understand only some things. But that child did know what consolation was all about.

So I said to the teacher, her father, 'If these suffering souls face their suffering with even one doxology, they will be joining with Paphnoutios, the confessor of our faith whose eye was poked out for his love of Christ.' The teacher understood this and was very happy. It was not just a false consolation. It is a fact. He realized that it was not an injustice. God is not unjust. One who does not accept this might say, 'What has this child done to deserve a tumour in the eye? They operate and the child grows up with a handicap.'

But I believe — and it is impossible for me not to believe it — that on the day of judgment this child, who has suffered for so long, will be rewarded by God.

On Having No Possessions, and Voluntary Poverty



Beneath the tattered clothing and destitute appearance of the ascetics lie a wealth of hidden virtues, as well as a spirit which is contemptuous against, and victorious over the materialistic world. Within their forced deprivation and hardship is a treasure of humility and the visible philosophy of life according to Christ.

True ascetics pursue this appearance: they do not wear new clothes, receive no money and deny themselves the pleasures of life. Their self-denial follows the teachings of the Eternal One: "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). They do not pay attention to appearances, particularly to the outer shell—to beautiful clothes, shoes, face, hair and body. Attention is focussed on substance and the depth of the inner man, the

adornment of mind and heart with uncreated loveliness, heavenly brightness and divine beauty.

The hermit Peter the Hosiopetritan had such a spiritual beauty—"not only meek in spirit but poor in body as well." This we were told by the reverend elder Gerasimos the Hymnographer, by the Danielites, by the Thomasites, by our reverend elder Paisios, and by Elder Loakim and others.

Peter was a simple and primitive soul, tall in spirit and short in stature (for which reason he was called Petrakis—"little Peter"). He would climb Athos to collect mountain tea to sell along with the prayer ropes he had made to earn a living. At one time he was offered extra money but he refused to have any of it. He had such gentleness and spiritual nobility such love and simple manner, that he once walked for many hours to the hut of a monk who requested to be under his obedience, to inform him: "I came to tell you not to trouble yourself by coming to St. Peter's cave where I live, because I am going to die." When the other monk inquired about what he could offer him, Peter asked only for some boiled water in which he placed some of his mountain tea, added a bit of sugar which he kept in another pouch, and drank. For him, one kilogram of sugar was enough for the entire year and there was always some left for the following year.

At one time when he paid a visit to Elder Ioakim in Karyes when it was getting dark, the elder asked him to spend the night. "I am going to the monastery of Xeropotamou," he replied. "I will walk until dark, then rest under a chestnut tree until dawn." That is what he did. That night, though, it poured torrential rain. He was soaked through his clothes and caught a bad cold. He returned to his hut to say goodbye to all his neighbours. Shortly afterwards, he fell asleep in the Lord.

There used to be a father confessor in Karyes, Father Germanos, who lived in a kavian, a room with a kitchen where the laymen stayed. There the monks who wanted to fight sleepiness while

praying would suspend themselves by ropes, the "kavia." For this reason, they were called Kaviotes. In this place Father Germanos received guests and workmen from around the world for counselling and confessions. He offered his hospitality to all, fed them, and strengthened their life in Christ. He possessed nothing to such an extent that by sunset he did not want even a paras.'

An elder named Makarios had absolutely no possessions. He used a tool called a "kossa" to harvest greens and sell them to feed animals. He would not accept any gifts. He liked to be self-sufficient. His little dwelling sparkled with cleanliness and good order. He said, "Here on Mount Athos, we need two eyes to see with. But in the outside world you need four. ..."

Elder Niphon, who lived in Katounakia, loved festivities and had a delightful habit during the celebration of any feast: he would pay his respects to someone's house by always extending his blessings and good wishes.

Two hermits who were brothers, Orestis and Konstantine, lived in an almost empty hut. Konstantine, who reposed in the Lord at Krya Nera, was the embodiment of poverty. He never wore shoes in either summer or winter.

Two famous hermits, Sophronios and Gabriel, lived in the hesychastic cell Gioannakopoula. Also a Romanian ascetic lived in the Nativity cave where he led an angelic life. He did no craft but spent his entire life in prayer with a prayer rope. He lived entirely on the fathers' charity.

In the cave of St. Peter the Athonite, where even the mere presence of a person would interrupt the solitude, there once lived a totally impoverished hermit. He went about wearing no shoes throughout the entire year. He led a carefree life, not having even an axe or a pair of pruning shears. He did his obedience under Father Daniel, a visionary hesychast. If someone brought them some chick peas or dry bread, a few fava

beans or a bit of fish, only then did he have something to eat. There were several pious fathers who lived in Kerasia over time. Among them were Elder Kosmas (who was nicknamed "the garlic man" and who had a hesychastic cell in the forest), Father Neophytos, Elder Daniel the Romanian, and Father John, who was the elder of Father Daniel. They devoted their whole life to ceaseless prayer and other spiritual endeavours. When their relics were translated, they had a yellow, waxy appearance, a sign of sanctification. They ran the race with force and with constant prayer to Jesus.

Holy Dionysios of Olympus was born at the end of the fifteenth century at Platina of Trikala. Prior to the construction of the monastery of the Holy Trinity, he lived on Mount Athos where he loved and practiced the hesychastic life. In a small hut belonging to Karakalou he lived a life of angelic fasting, all-night vigils, and prayer. He fed only on a few chestnuts each day, and those only after the ninth hour.

He was so poor, this blessed one, that he never locked his door. He owned nothing but a worthless, tattered raso. He stayed there only three years, praying to God. He never acquired any material possessions, even to the time he came to be called by God to depart for heaven.

The spiritual father Lakovos from Vigla used to say: "Look upon my humility and struggle, and forgive all my sins." He devoted himself entirely to hardship and ascetic labours. He used to carry sand on foot for five hours at a time, from the shoreline to where he built his chapel.

Only God knows how hermit Dionysios, a fool for Christ's sake, maintained himself and where he found oil to burn in the lamps in his hut. The main reason for this was that he had never asked for charity. Only near the end of his life did he accept any. He arrived on Athos in 1842 and reposed in 1880. So much did he desire to be a non-possessor, to have a carefree life and poverty,

that he was almost kicked out of Lavra for not taking care of his Holy Apostles cell in Kerasia. His vineyard and orchard were full of weeds. All this man's efforts were directed toward the tending of another kind of field: the one where spiritual vigilance is cultivated and maintained.

His name was Lakovos. He came from Chimara of Northern Hiperos, and he had served the country during the war of 1912. With immense effort and sacrifice, he had built and dedicated a church in honour of the Three Hierarchs. He was destitute, and his hut consisted of one room only. For a mattress he used a bale of hay. He also kept another one, in the event of the rare visitor's staying overnight. A cape was his blanket, and in the morning he would stow his straw bed in a corner. Usually he ate only greens and dry bread.

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Elder Chrysostomos was an innocent and possessionless hermit. Wearing no shoes, he struggled ascetically in the cave of Holy Peter the Athonite. His food was chestnuts, greens, and dry bread.

I met also another one who was indeed a Chrysostomos because of his sweet utterances and Christ-like meekness. He lived in a barren hut in Kafsokalyvia's skete. I met him one time while I was with my elder who was his contemporary and had learned the craft of woodcarving in that barren hut. This is mentioned in his book *Memories from Panagia's Garden*.

What can one say about the ascetic elder Georgios who resided in the tiny Lavriotan kathisma of St. Konstantine? He dressed in a tattered robe, went barefoot, and always prayed in a standing position, like a continually burning oil lamp. He had only a wooden stool for sitting or sleeping. Such was Elder Georgios.

Like two lonely birds, peaceful together, were the hermits Antonios and Simeon. They had come originally from Athens. One took care of the household and the other of the garden, for

which he had to bring water from far away. They lived on very little. They never spoke evil of anyone. Their hut was a small, simple one near the monastery of Pantokratoros, and it resembled a bird's nest.

Simeon died first; a few years later Antonios followed, approximately one hundred years old. After Simeon died, Antonios had struggled to endure loneliness. So they took him to live in the monastery of Koutlounousiou to be looked after, but for only a short time; for soon he returned to his beloved hut, dragging his feet and bent over almost to the ground, but nevertheless happy and rejoicing. Finally, he was delivered from his ascetic labours and voluntary deprivation. Because he had had no one to dig up his relics after the customary three years in the ground, he appeared to many, pleading with them and persuading them to do so.

One monk in a cenobitic monastery lived for sixty years in the same raso that he had worn on the day of his tonsure.

A proven athlete of poverty, simplicity and deprivation was Elder Kallinikos, a Cypriot who did his ascetic labours with his brother Gregorios in St. Anne's Skete. He continued his ascetic endeavours in Stavrovounion on Cyprus. At his repose he left behind only a rotten mattress infested with bedbugs, a wooden box full of mites and stuffed with rags, suitable only for firewood, a pair of shoes mended a thousand times, and two or three forgotten paras in a wooden box.

To those gathered around, the elder's natural brother, Hegumen Barnabas, said with tears in his eyes: "Look, Fathers, at Kallinikos' wealth which he acquired during his life as a monk. Truly 'A monk is the one who possesses nothing during his present life on earth, except Christ Himself.'"

Bishop Hierotheos of Militoupolis, who stayed in the hut of St. Eleftherios at Anne's Skete, owned absolutely nothing. In addition to all the other virtues he had of self-control, patience,

and meekness, he was also particularly known for his love toward destitute monks, to whom he distributed every bit of his monthly income. He fell asleep in the Lord at the age of eighty-eight.

In the hermitage of Elder Neophytos nothing else could be found but a bag full of dry bread. Only on weekends would he visit the Danielites, who were and still are a comfort in the desert, to eat with them at their trapeza. Then he would vanish for the whole week. It was rumoured that when he fell asleep in the Lord at the monastery of Lavra, his countenance shone.

Elder A., of the holy cell of Saint Charalambros in Karyes, was so poor that he wore no other raso but the one which belonged to his elder.

Elder Nektarios from Romania lived above the skete of St. Anne near the hut named for St. Artemios, which belonged to the monastery of St. Panteleimon. He never left Mount Athos from the time he was tonsured. He was poor, having absolutely no possessions. He sold to the other fathers sticks which he had cut for use with climbing bean plants. Near the end of his life he spent his entire days in total solitude and prayer.

Elder Chrysanthos of St. Anne's recounted that after the repose of the pious elder Chariton of St Anne's, the only thing found in his hut was a clay urn for water.

Father Avvakoum from the day of his tonsure to the day of his death went barefoot, with only one exception: on the feast day of St. Athanasios of Athos he would put shoes on.

The ever memorable Father Auxentios the Gregoriatan was never seen wearing new clothes. He wore mended undershirts, and he owned one pair of shoes which he put on while he was within the monastery. At other times he went barefoot

everywhere — along all the roads and paths and rocks of Mount Athos. His bed was a wooden bench; he had a small table and some simple icons above his bed; and there were only a few utensils on his shelf, the only interior decorations of his cell. Crippled Michael the Lavriotan had nothing in his cell, absolutely no possessions. The day he reposed he received the same honours as a bishop. His face shone and had a yellow, waxy appearance.

An elder with no possessions said: "There was a little aged monk who led a simple life. He owned nothing. This is the way a person can be free. All the things that we today call conveniences, even a tiny sponge, can be a hindrance. The only convenience for anyone is to simplify his life, to limit himself to what is absolutely necessary. Only then can he be free."

Poor hermit Anatolios, who died in 1938, earned his living by gathering mountain tea and wild flowers at Athos' mountain top. They would ask him, "Don't you endanger yourself climbing on the ravines and cliffs?"

He would reply: "Not at all, Blessed Ones. I fasten myself with ropes. I am used to it because before I became a monk I used to be a sailor."

He lived near the kyriakon of Holy Cross in Kafsokalyvia Skete. He was one of the most destitute and most pious of monks. He used to ask the skete's miller for the milled flour which was unsuitable for use, containing as it did sand from the mill stones. On days of the week when oil was allowed, he would eat food mixed with oil which he measured with a small saucer. Into this oil he dipped an onion or a piece of bread. What an ascetic race he ran with dignity and perseverance! He ate cooked food only when he was invited as a guest.

He loved the icon of the Crucifixion, before which he offered his tearful and ceaseless prayers, and frequently from the icon itself would flow tears. He also revered Panagia greatly. At

night when lying on his bed, turned on one side and until he fell asleep, he would chant with all his might "It is truly fitting to bless you." He knew very little music but with a deep, loud voice would chant this hymn in the second tone, the one in which the Archangel had originally sung it to the Mother of God. Often he could sing it up to ten times a night. His obedient subordinate at first was bothered by it, but later got used to it. Any time he went to Karyes to sell his tea, he would go to the cell called Axion Esti, which is named for the magnification of the Theotokos and in honour of the appearance of the Archangel to her when the hymn was first sung. After he venerated the icon, he chanted the hymn to the Theotokos with great piety. While he was chanting, the oil lamp would sway. The fathers thought that this occurred because of his thunderous voice. He then went to the narthex to sing. And again the lamp would sway. When the other fathers sang, the lamp remained motionless.

These are wonders worth mentioning, worked by such a simple and child-like soul, in which dwelt the grace of the Lord Who is "great in His will and marvellous in His works."

Elder Theophylaktos, also worth mentioning, lived in the skete of Xenophontos as an obedient monk. He kept God in his heart, and God looked after him. He came from a wealthy family, but he left behind the vain and pleasurable things of this world and placed himself under obedience to the simple elder Kosmas. His mother wanted to send him a hundred lira at that time, but he refused it.

While praying he always stood up throughout the night.

His countenance was like that of an angel.

Elder Euthymios lived in the same skete in a small goat pen hut named for the Holy Archangels. In the centre of his hut he used to hang a big sack filled with dry bread, the food he ate all through his life.

A hermit said: "Fast, vigilance, and prayer: anyone who practices these virtues can succeed in anything. One should lead a simple life. You see my hut is empty. In any household only the necessary things should be there. Too many things are a hindrance to the spiritual life."

New Skete's ever memorable elder Theophylaktos reposed in the Lord peacefully in the year 1986. He was a simple, humble, guileless monk, enduring all trials and tribulations coming from either men or Satan. Near the end of his life he lost his sight, but he never complained about his blindness.

He was particularly known for his apostolic lack of possessions and his carefree attitude in relation to the material things which are needed for sustenance. He cared neither for an occupation nor for money. He unceasingly prayed and thanked God for everything. He did his obedience under blessed Joakim Spetsieris (of whom he spoke frequently to me, the least of all). Later on he became a student of Elder Joseph the cave-dweller. Before the loss of his sight, his obedience tasks were to distribute all mail for the skete, and to light the oil lamps for all the prayer stands, which he visited twice a day, no matter what the weather conditions were.



On Heresies and Other Religions

Representatives of the papist Byzantine emperor Michael Paleologos and the Patriarch John Vekkos came to Mount Athos to impose by force a union of the Orthodox Church with Rome. The Athonite monks, frontier guardians and soldiers of Orthodoxy, reacted peacefully and with courage to all their efforts, which were marked by savagery, violence and criminality—the stigmas of papal history.

In the Protaton, Vekkos' men hanged the overseer of the Holy

Community and on a piece of marble which is preserved to this day, beheaded the neo-martyrs and confessors of the faith remaining there, thirteen of them all together, who were occupying various cells in Karyes. They were slain for steadfastly defending the Orthodox faith and because they would not accept union with the unrepentant pope. Such were our holy fathers: "Beautiful branches, mystical grapes, tireless defenders and trustees of Orthodoxy and its Holy Tradition."

The holy martyrs of Vatopedi were as many as the twelve Apostles. Their hegumen Euthymios also suffered martyrdom for the sake of our holy faith during the savage invasion by the troops of Emperor Michael Paleologos and Patriarch Vekkos. The twelve were hanged on Phourkovounion, and Euthymios was drowned after he was tied with heavy chains and submerged in the sea of Kalamidjiou. In addition to them, worth mentioning also are the holy martyrs of Ivion who were drowned in the sea by the soldiers of the emperor and his patriarch.

All twenty-six holy martyrs of Zographou complete the sanctified chorus of martyrs of our Orthodoxy. They were burned as a pure offering by papists within the monastery's towers.

Our holy father Nikiphoros, who had been a papist, when he joined the Eastern Orthodox Church became a hesychast in the desert of the Holy Mountain. There he wrote the method of noetic prayer which is included in the Philokalia.

St. Gregory Palamas, champion of theologians, took part in three major synods, at which he struggled against the Latin-minded heresies of Varlaam, Akindynos, and Gregoras, who denied the divine and uncreated energies of God.

At one time Father B. went to a village on business for his

monastery. The villagers came to him as soon as he arrived, asking him persistently to help them defend the Truth before an Evangelical preacher who, using quotations from the Bible, was bothering them greatly with slanders regarding the veneration of saints and the Theotokos. The monk was simple and almost illiterate, and he felt awkward. But after he had thought for a while, recalling all he had frequently read about the saints and their lives, he invited the Protestant preacher to meet with him and proposed this:

"Let us light a fire," he said, "in the middle of the village square. Each one of us will go through it and let God prove this way which from the two of us has the Truth."

Very early the next morning the villagers gathered wood and piled it up in a great heap in the middle of the square. Father B. arrived, but the preacher did not come. He had fled, taking the first boat out at daylight. The whole village raised cries of joy for the glorious victory over the teachings of human deceit. When Father B. returned to the monastery, the other monks asked him: "Were you prepared to go through the fire?"

"I was anxious, but I did not doubt our faith, and I thought: 'On this earth you deserve nothing but to be in hell. It would be better if you were burned here on earth than to be burning through eternity. Let us then enter into the fire'." Thus did this deeply humble, simple monk defend our Faith — just as had the first martyrs and the spiritual fathers before him.

Frequently the fathers of Mount Athos say: "If we were to remain silent when our Faith needs defending against heresies, what then would be the point of our staying on these cliffs all these many years?" Dogmas cannot enter the Common Market as material goods can.

When questioned as to whether or not miracles occur in other religions, an elder replied: "There is a difference! Even Hodja is

a miracle worker. By using magic, he tries to make light appear. In contrast, we ignore any light coming from the devil. Some hold their noses, pull their ears, rub their eyes, and cause illusions. We ask God for a miracle, not the devil. We fight evil day and night."

A pious, charismatic Agioritan who had lived in North America for many years, said: "The Orthodox Church imitates the humility of the Lord Jesus. Many seeing the exactness of our Faith, marvel and change from heretics to Orthodox."

"They have overlooked the head to revere the cap" the wise, vigilant Father Kallinikos said when he was asked to give his opinion of the Russian heresy of the Name Worshippers.

An elder spoke this way about love for the pure Faith: 'Anger is needed only when we defend our Faith. It is not needed for the defence of ourselves. If someone speaks ill against us we ought to accept it. We should be angry however, when our Faith is attacked: anger used to defend Orthodoxy is appropriate.'

Very often our youthful heart was refreshed by the cool fountain of teaching which flowed from the venerable Hieromonk Athanasios the Iviritan. He would so often say:

The Protestant North, through the professors of our two Greek universities, cooled our warm affections toward our sweetest Mother Panagia. Thus for a time she was distanced from our prayers as direct intercessor and mediator for us to her Son.

Even some clergy when discussing prayer, ignore the Theotokos and repeatedly refer to her as the 'first after the One,' meaning that she is the intercessor closest to God — whereas the hymnography of the Church through and through calls her by her blessed name. It is unacceptable that our Greek Orthodox Church should be influenced by such a rationalistic, Germanic, Protestant spirit.

I was asked which is the right way: to say 'Most Holy Theotokos

save us,' or to say 'Most Holy Theotokos intercede for us.' This question was influenced by some modernized, Protestant-minded Orthodox people whom I have considered most disrespectful enemies of Panagia. I replied to them: The accepted way, always, is to say "Save us".'

A Lutheran minister from Oslo came to me once. He was a friend and student of Orthodoxy. We talked about many things. He asked me about the Theotokos. My reply to him was: 'We worship God, we honour the saints, and we venerate the only Mother of God with pure filial emotions, for she is our sweetest Mother by grace. Oh, how you are deprived,' I told him, 'because you do not venerate her who is the second after God to administer His gifts to all mankind.'

According to Augustine, three things could not have been more perfectly created by our omnipotent God than these the Incarnation, the Virgin, and the blessed life of the just in the life to come



On Hesychia and the Cleansing of the Mind and Heart

A proven lover of the desert was the blessed Russian hieromonk Father Serapios, who visited the great hesychast and recluse Kallinikos in 1912-13, to ask his blessing that he might depart and join those athletes who contended in the field of the desert. Elder Kallinikos, an experienced teacher of the Jesus Prayer, described to the Russian monk the dangers, traps and delusions which the enemy of our salvation uses to attack those who live in seclusion, especially those without a spiritual guide. But when he saw Father Serapion's wounded heart, burning with divine desire, he gave in, on condition that he could be his guide.

Father Serapios celebrated the liturgy in St. Gerasimos' chapel and then, with the prayers and blessing of his coach and elder Kallinikos, left to go toward Athos' peak.

Twelve years passed since that meeting. Then one night, around midnight, the great hesychast's disciple came to his teacher's remote hut and knocked on the door. Elder Kallinikos, thinking that the knock might be a delusion from the devil, asked, before he opened the door, for the Symbol of Faith to be recited. Father Serapios obeyed, even adding the "Our Father" and the "One is Holy, One is the Lord Jesus Christ, to the glory of God the Father." At this, Elder Kallinikos opened the door, threw his arms around him and asked, "Where have you been all these years, my brother? Believe me, I thought you were lost, although I never stopped praying for you. Where did you stay? What was your food?"

"Holy Father," replied Father Serapios in a weak voice, "after you blessed me, I went to the peak of Athos. I stayed three days and nights, but not being able to endure the cold, I went to Panagia.¹ I tried to stay there, but I could not find my beloved hesychia, because many pilgrims visited there.

"A bit farther down, I discovered a cave. Not even the shepherds of Lavra when herding their sheep could see me there, because I hung an old cassock over the cave's opening. I ate the things I found in the forest: chestnuts, shoots, acorns, roots and bulbs. I drew water from the well near Panagia's hut. Day and night my soul was filled with ineffable bliss coming from the Jesus Prayer and visions.

"I lived constantly contemplating our God's mysteries. Forgive me, my elder, you know better than I what it is like, that light which warms up and illuminates all within me. I desired nothing else. Paradise was there. I lacked only one thing. The Holy Communion. And that is why I have finally come here: to receive your blessing; for the time of my repose is near, and I do

not want to depart without the Holy Mysteries."

That very day the Divine Liturgy was served, and they communicated. Afterwards the disciple had a bit of dry bread and greens together with his teacher and guide. Thus full of bliss, Father Serapios departed for his beloved desert.

The great hesychastic father Daniel the Hosiopetritan, after the daily liturgy would withdraw into his cell for an hour of silence. It was an hour dedicated to tears and compunction. He would always say that "The lantern illuminates the world around it, but buries its mouth . . ."

There have been many ascetic fathers on the Holy Mountain who were dedicated totally to prayer, vision, and practising all the virtues. That is why they received divine consolations from heaven, illuminations from above. Such was the Romanian hermit Theophylaktos, who came from Vatopedi to St. Basil's desert with three monks under obedience to him. Frequently he stayed in caves, in which it was possible to attain greater hesychia, clearer watchfulness of mind, and higher exaltation of soul. He used to say that in one of the caves of this desert, the idolaters who had inhabited the Athonite peninsula prior to the monks' arrival had hidden a statue which had once stood on the peak of Mount Athos and served as a lighthouse. There was a large diamond on the statue's head which was used as a sort of lamp to guide travellers by sea.

At one time Theophylaktos, who prayed unceasingly, did not go to the cave as was his usual habit. He stayed in his hut by himself instead. During his prayer an angel of the Lord appeared and conversed with him. Coming back from accomplishing a

task which had been assigned to him, one of the elder's monks in obedience passed by the hut and heard a discussion. He wondered who the visitor was to whom his elder was talking. With curiosity he entered, calling "Elder! are you here?" At that very moment the angel disappeared.

"O, my son," the elder sadly replied, he who was such a great runner in the heavenly race. "I wish you had not come I have lost a great blessing." And he explained the visitation.

He is the same father who took care of the wounded roedeer, and his face shone with light shortly before his falling asleep.

I once had the blessing of meeting the elder Christodoulos, who had been a monk under obedience to the great neptic² father of Katounakia, Kallinikos the Recluse. In the course of one day's polite hospitality to me, the unworthy, in his remote hermitage, Father Christodoulos told me much about his ever memorable elder, some of which is included in the third edition of Contemporary Agioritan Profiles.

Elder Kallinikos was a teacher of the Jesus Prayer and visions who for fifty-five years had confined himself within the limits of his hut, which measured twenty metres in all.

That is why he was called a recluse. He was born in 1853 and reposed in 1930.

A friend and lover of hesychia, of vigilance and of noetic³ prayer was Dionysios from Cyprus, who as an ascetic remained in Kafsokalyvia's skete and then returned to Stavrovouniou in Cyprus in 1875, where he became the father of many spiritual children.

There is a prayerful, eremitic breeze which often blows over the blessed Katounakia. There many years ago I met the hesychastic

elder Anthimos. He struggled in ascesis in a hut above where the Danielites were located. He was a man of silence. Whenever he did talk, he almost always spoke about the ceaseless prayer of the heart, noetic prayer. "The Jesus Prayer deifies man, while praying to the Theotokos prepares one for deification," he used to say.

"All Holy Mother of God, help me. My blessed Panagia . . ." a monk would say, and his voice echoed sweetly from the depths of his heart as he walked on the paths of St. Anne's skete. "We place all our hope in her, and we are consoled by her," he continued. "She is our mother, our heart's salvation. Otherwise we are following a route which we do not know where it is leading."



On Judging and Criticism

A spiritual father confessor named Benjamin, when a person who had come to him for confession was talk-only about others and criticising his brothers, would send the "penitent" away until he could correct himself and his attitude.

The most simple Dionysiatan monk Elder David would tell his visitors this about criticism: "Be careful; do not say person does this and the other does that. If you do so, you lose Christ's grace. Even if you see a person acting like -.do not criticize. Love your neighbour as you would your own self. This is what Christ tells us to do."

A young visitor once was scandalized when he saw the well known spiritual father Gregorios caressing his cat, and he criticized him. It so happened, however, that this your person who was so judgmental later found himself destitute in Turkey, and he went to the ambassador there to ask for job.

"I have nothing else to offer except that I need , someone : to look after my dog; if you take the job you can feed whatever is left over after my dog has eaten."

The young man accepted the employment, because at that time he did not have even one piece of bread to eat But when he came to himself, he realized the terrible « he was in, and he thought that it was a retribution for it in Father Gregorios. When he had an opportunity, he went by boat to Mount Athos and to Small St. Anne's, when. bowed to the spiritual father and asked his forgiveness

Father Gregorios said to him, "I knew you had judged. me, my son, and our souls' enemy sent you away, a' prayed to St. Anne to bring you back, and she did. Beware, though! Do not judge the monastics, for many times' hide their virtues and pretend they are fools, so that they might not be praised."

The God-inspired spiritual father Savvas never critics anyone. When they would ask him, "What kind of per is that, Father?" he would always say, "That man is a saintly man!"

An elderly monk said, 'Always, when you are tempted criticize, you should put a question mark on the whole situation and not judge. For we do not know what is really going on.'

The famous father Dionysios, one of the Kartsonians, advised the monk Daniel: "My son, from the things hear against someone you should not believe anything believe only half of what you see. In fact, not even half of it. For many pretend to be fools. Do not judge."



On Myrrh-flowing Relics and Their Fragrance

ST Theophylos the myrrh-gusher lived in the time of the holy Patriarch Niphon (1556). He was sent by the Patriarch and the Holy Synod to Egypt to confirm the amazing miracle which had taken place there, the movement of the mountain Ntour Tag from one place to another. Even though in the world he had received various ecclesiastical offices, including notaries, St. Theophylos had abandoned everything to come to Mount Athos, where he had lived the ascetic life in the holy monasteries of Vatopedi and Iviron, and in St. Basil's cell of Pantokratoros. Before his repose in the Lord, this ever memorable one had asked his disciple not to bury his body but to throw it into the woods. This was done. For forty days the wild beasts and fowl did not attack his holy body.

His tomb emitted a sweet smell of myrrh which even to this day is sensed by pious people who come to revere his relics. Such was holy Theophilos, God's true friend, the fragrant rose of virtue and ascesis.

In 1948 there reposed in the Lord a newly manifested saint, j our father Savvas of St. Anne's, who after he left the Holy Land, went to live in Kalymnos, where he established the All Saints

Monastery for women.

He was a pupil of St. Nectaries the miracle worker. Tel years after his departing to the Lord, when his relics were translated his body was found whole and intact, emitting the fragrance of myrrh and working miracles. Indeed, this in the way God glorifies those who glorify Him.

In the desolate area between Kafsokalyvia and Vigla, in the steepest cave on Mount Athos, our holy father Neilos the myrrh-gusher had lived, leading a totally ascetic life of sanctity. After he fell asleep in the Lord, so much myrrh poured forth from his tomb that it flowed down through the floor of the cave and into the ravine below.

St. Simeon had been the spiritual father of St. Savvas the! Serbian. After St. Simeon reposed, a vigil was offered in the monastery of Chilandari on the memorial day of his passing. During the Doxology there came from the saint's tomb! an ineffable fragrance which filled the whole area surrounding the monastery. This manifestation assured St. Savvas that his spiritual father was sanctified, and he gave thanks' to the all-merciful God Who glorifies in return all those who glorify Him.

St. Simon, the builder of the holy Simonopetra Monastery, led his ascetic life in a cave near the monastery, a cave which is preserved to this day. He heard the voice of the Mother of God during a Christmas vigil; he wrestled with demons victoriously; he saved his disciple who had fallen down the ravine from a great height; and he cured the possessed daughter of King John

Ouglesi of Serbia. Following his repose, myrrh flowed from his holy relics, palpable evidence of his sanctity.

Great in virtue, good works and faith also was St. Athanasios from Esphigmenou, an excellent cenobitic who served in the monastery's trapeza. Because of his great humility, he was raised to the office of Patriarch of Constantinople and, as St. Gregory Palamas tells us, his tomb and relics became a source of miracles and untold fragrance, for the glory of God and of monasticism.

In 1840 in the holy monastery of Vatopedi, the monks decided to transfer the bones of the deceased fathers to another location. After they had torn down one of the walls of the massive crypt and reached its foundation, they smelled an ineffable fragrance, a "smell beyond this world." As they went further on, they saw that the fragrance was coming from the relics of an unknown saint whose skin and bones were still intact. With great reverence and piety, the priests, fully vested, placed the body in a casket and with lit candles brought it to the monastery's main church. Although they did not know whose body it was, they all agreed to name him Eudokimos, and he is honoured on October 5th of each year.

From the position of the uncorrupted relics, it is clear that this unknown saint, now called Eudokimos, when he knew that his end was near, came to the crypt where among the bones, he prepared himself: he crossed his hands and went to the sleep of the just, unknown and invisible to all, avoiding human praise and destructive glorification.

Monk Savvas from the kellion of St. Nicholas, which is attached to the little chapel of Ravthouhos and presently belongs to Pantokratoros, was known for being faithful in attendance at services and for his piety and bodily endurance of ascetic labours. For a time, he lived in the cenobitic monastery of Esphigmenou. When he realized his end was near, he came to the monastery in which he had begun as a monastic. When, three years after his repose, his relics were translated, his skull gave off a fragrant scent, an event which became well known. A novice of the monastery, filled with the doubt of weak faith, thought that they might have poured some fragrance on the relic; so he took the skull and threw it into a reservoir of water. With great sadness the elders searched for it. Twelve days later he revealed where he had thrown it. It was still emitting the fragrance. Then the novice believed that Monk Savvas was indeed a holy man.

I remember when I first came to the Holy Mountain," an old monk told me. "I would pass by the skete's cemetery and the crypt where the fathers' relics were kept. Numerous times I smelled such a fragrance coming from them that I would stop there to enjoy the wonderful experience." He was eighty-nine years old, and his emotions were obvious on his face. "But two years passed by and I lost this gift from God. I did not smell the heavenly fragrance again. The Lord deprived me of it. Who knows why? Probably because of my sins, or because He may have given me this divine gift only for a time, in order to strengthen me at the beginning of my monastic life."

In the Meeting of the Lord kalyve, which is located above St. Anne's Skete, lived the pious monk Elder Dionysios. He was trying to repair some old ledges at a point where one ledge was crumbling when he unearthed the relics of an unknown ascetic, completely preserved.

Amazed and very moved by this finding, for the relics gave off a marvellous fragrance, he started to pray, asking the unknown saint to reveal his name. He also had a thought to go to the main church and ring the bells to notify the fathers so that they could bring the relics to St. Anne's central church with honour and incense, and so that they could pray and ask the saint to reveal to whom these holy relics belonged.

While he was thinking this, the blessed ascetic appeared to him in a vision and ordered him in a stern voice to cover the relics and not to reveal to anyone, as long as he lived, that God had made him worthy of seeing them. Elder Dionysios told his group of monks about this event shortly

before he died, but without telling the exact location where the relics were buried — stopped by the command of the unknown saint who, even after his death, avoided the glory of men; for he was honoured by God in the Heavenly Kingdom.

The ever memorable elder Pavlos the Lavriotan, a medical doctor, in one of his letters to me in 1971 wrote the following: Talking with Elder Gerontios, one of the Danielites, I had mentioned to him Father Leontios, one of the well-known spiritual fathers from Moutalaski of Kaisaria, whom I had met and some of whose work Orthodox Catechism, written in Turkish, I had read. It was an important work to the

Karamanlides, and we have it in our library. He replied to me that Elder Leontios had died in Thessaloniki where, on his translation day, his body was discovered to be undissolved and gave off fragrance.

A Christian once had read in the biography of St. Akakio the Kafsokalyvitan, that while he was passing by St. Anne! graveyard, he smelled a fragrance of myrrh coming from of the father's relics. Remembering this, the Christian, who was sitting in the skete's graveyard, said "I wonder if there are still such relics like those in St. Akakios' days." Immediately after he had thought this, he smelled a fragrance coming from the graveyard! He got up, searched all around, and found a skull which had an fragrant scent, it was inscribed "Hieromonk Philimonos, from the Dormition of the Theotokos hut, near the St. Eleftherios vouleftirion. He thought to call the others, but at that thought he started shaking, for he realized that the deified father would not want him to tell about the fragrance coming from his relic.

I do not remember the exact year (it may have been twenty years ago), on the feast day of the Forerunner St. John the Baptist, in St. Dionysios' holy monastery, just before Compline I went through the small door of the sanctuary and smelled a fragrance known as that of the Forerunner, coming from the holy sanctuary. . .

At other times when I have been walking on the path from the cell of St. Neilos the Myrrh-gusher toward the Great Lavra, on Chairi, I have smelled waves of fragrant breeze.

On this same spot many fathers and travelers and pilgrims have had the same experience. It has been passed down by word of

mouth that in this area many hermits have struggled in past times, leading ascetic lives at the highest spiritual level of grace and sanctity. The exact locations of their burial places are unknown.

In 1927 on the feast day of St. John the Baptist's birthdate, a monk who was the monastery's cook smelled an ineffable fragrance during the magnification, when the Holy Forerunner's right hand is revered. He confided this occurrence to Father Lazaros.

The ever memorable elder Lazaros, among his many stories about the fathers and brothers of Dionysiou, told us also about the blessed end of the hieromonk Markos, who was hegumen of the monastery between 1926 and 1931 and who for his whole life went about serving in three or four obediences, happy and humble. He ate only once a day.

At the time of Father Markos' repose, Father Lazaros was an Infirmarian in the monastery. The very moment that Father Markos slept in the Lord, the whole hospital room was filled with fragrance which lasted twenty minutes, which was witnessed also by the blessed hegumen of the monastery at that time, Father Gabriel, who had come to read a prayer for the dying.

It has long been known that buried in the holy ground of Mount Athos, filling the garden of the Mother of God with the fragrance of myrrh, are many saints from whose relics flow this sweet oil of holiness. In Xenophontos in 1989, it was the feast

day of the holy and great victorious martyr St. George, he who, in addition to all his other charisms, is a myrrh-gusher. The vigil, full of grandeur and piety, had just begun when, in the middle of Compline, the holy hegumen Alexios, clearly moved, interrupted the service to announce to all the marvellous, and for the first time occurring incident of myrrh flowing from St. George's hand. It was a sign that the saint was present. Father Alexios immediately had the paraklesis to St. George served and the holy relic revered by everyone.

Shortly before this gracious manifestation, Father Alexios had invited into the sanctuary the Most Reverend Ambrosios, Metropolitan of Polianis and Kilkisiou, a hierarch noted for his support of monasticism and thus a bright presence on this feast day. Also in the bema were Archimandrite Christodoulos, the hegumen of Koutloumousiou, as well as the abbot of St. Anne's Skete, the spiritual father Anthimos, who was in his eighties. All of these were there to confirm by eyewitness the grace of myrrh-flowing.

All of us who were present at this festal celebration, the representatives of the monasteries, the hermits, the cenobitic monks, and the faithful, venerated this relic with uplifted hearts, and with the piety and compunction which were suited to this moment, when the mighty and faithful guardian of the mountain, St. George, was present with us, leading the feast, glorifying God and being glorified by Him in return. It was as if we all, full of piety, were saying silently, "Great are You, O Lord ... no words are sufficient to praise your wonders."

At the point where the relic was flowing myrrh, it looked as if it had a wound. And the fragrance emanating from it was, characteristically, the same fragrance that all holy relics have. The grace of this holy relic was consonant with the joyful message announced at the vigil: "We preach Christ who was crucified, and who is risen from the dead. O Death, where is your sting? Hell, where is your victory? Christ is risen and you

have been defeated!"

The blossoms on the lemon trees and the roses in the monastery's garden were confirming the spring's presence, and the flowing of myrrh from the "Slave's Deliverer" was declaring that "the Lord has risen indeed!" Even the Doxastikon was filled with fragrance and mystical power:

Spring has appeared: let us rejoice! Christ's resurrection has shone forth! Come, let us rejoice in the mention of the Victor, Who gives joy to the faithful



On Piety, Order, Accuracy, and Respect toward the Venerable Fathers

The fathers of earlier times were pious, careful and/strict. They were unconcerned about their outward appearance, their face and hair, caring not whether their face or hair looked good. Their rasos were short. They kept their heads down with piety and respect and avoided a direct gaze at anyone's face. They were shy. They did not converse or laugh. In the church they wore slippers.

Once the monk Modestos had a new pair of shoes that made a noise when he was walking. The other monks called to him and asked that he wear the new shoes when he was at home and the old ones in church.

"We were afraid to look up at the elderly fathers an ascetic said, meaning that there was fear, respect and piety towards them. "It used to be so. How is it now? O what times these are!"

Elder Antonios the Kafsokalyvitan was a perfect example of order and exactness in Agioritan rules. He was a pious monk,

simple and humble. He was always uttering "God bless," or "may it be blessed," or "through the prayers of our Holy Fathers." He always wore his raso. All the elders remember him with nostalgia.

Once we asked an ascetic who was over eighty years old to tell us something that would benefit us, about the fathers of the past. He then replied laconically: "What can I tell you? The past fathers were different. They were pious."

There was a blessed group in Vigla's hut of the Three Holy Children. The pious elder M. from Kerasia told me all about this group. Their elder Dositheos was very strict. The most senior subordinate to him was the monk Agathodoros.' most pious of all was Father Akakios, who had a beard which reached to his waist. He predicted his own death, and most of the time he had tears of joy in his eyes. When there was a visitor he would sit down with his hands crossed. They were all reverent and silent. Only the elder would speak. "I dead person does not do anything," they would say. Until the elder told them to do so, they would not offer anything to their guests. They knew nothing of anger. They judged no one. They were filled with inner prayer, joy, happiness Even in their sleep they saw Christ.

On the eve of a monk's tonsure, the ever memorable] hegumen Gabriel ate olives. For that reason, the tonsure was postponed, as he told us. He should have eaten on plain bread, as he did the following day, even though it was the feast of the Annunciation.

Even though the seventy-nine year old Dionysiatan monk Nikiphoros was dying, suffering as he was from asthma and myocarditis, he refused to take a bit of milk or fish during the Great Fast. "If I ate, Elder," he said "would I not die? I thank you for your fatherly love, but for sixty years now I have not spoiled a Great Lent. It does not feel right to do it now. A little bit of soup made with oil is good enough for me. Give me the sacrament of Holy Unction, for in five or six days I am departing to the Lord."

Venerable elder Lakovos of Dionysiou was famous for his piety. The ever memorable hegumen Gabriel and Father Lazaros told us all about his admirable life. One year while Elder Lakovos was typikaris, during a feast day his fellow Monks offered him a glass of wine after the meal in the wine cellar of the trapeza, which they call "spolokanis," but he refused. They insisted, but he kept telling them that it would be harmful to him. They accused him of pride. Finally, the simple elder, who was very exact in his monastic rules, to prove to them that they were pressuring him because of the devil picked up the glass full of wine with his left hand and made the sign of the cross over it with his right. Immediately the glass shattered, and before everyone's eyes, all the wine poured out of it. Elder Lakovos explained that while he was being pressed to violate his rule and drink the wine, he could see the devil in the glass, boldly making fun. It was then that he realized that the devil was behind the brothers' supposed kindness.

There are monks who feed spiritually on saints' lives. They constantly communicate with the saints. They talk with them. They feel the presence and activity of all the saints of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Triumphant Church. They are scholars of saints' lives, experts in chanting, in typikon, in feasts and vigils, in miracles. Such was the most simple elder Theoktistos from Dionysiou, who was bent over by years of ascetic labour.

There is no pilgrim to the monastery of St. Dionysios who will not be taken willingly or unwillingly by Theoktistos to visit the cell of St. Niphon and venerate the icon of Christ on the wall there. With child-like love and piety, Theoktistos will draw the visitor to this icon, which had been revealed to St. Niphon in a vision. He will also bring him to the nearby cell of St. Nikodemos.

Because Elder Theoktistos is from Epiros, he especially favours Epirotan saints—all of them, of course. He reads the saints' synaxaria every day, being careful not to miss even one, not even any of the neomartyrs. He is willing, meek, and never angry about working at any task. I remember when Elder Lazaros was still living, he who worshipped the divine Name of Christ and said always the Jesus Prayer. He had the junior father Theoktistos under his protection, because the latter was tested by many monies who scolded him, thinking him either stupid or crazy. But this simple monk would endure these tests with rare patience rejoicing at all his sufferings. Elder Lazaros once told me in confidence that he knew a monk, who is still living, out of whose hands wild birds would come and eat. I think I understand whom he meant.

Always there were, and there still are ascetic Agioritan monks who keep strictly all the typikon, all the fasts, all the vigils, all the traditions. Such a one was Father Neophytos. He celebrated

in New Skete's huts. His constant desire was to liturgize. Once Deacon Seraphim, one of the Abrahamite fathers, fell asleep during a vigil. Father Neophytos would not allow him to participate in the Liturgy. He said to him the same thing he would have said to any of the clergy: "Father, you cannot celebrate in the Liturgy because you slept during the vigil, and you have not read the prayers before Holy Communion." On Thanksgiving and Sacramental Life

In the large cenobitic monasteries of Mount Athos, the bloodless sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist is served daily. In the most dynamic and mystical way, monasticism experiences the Eucharistic life of the Church and the mystery of the communion in Christ, as well as the eschatological meaning of the Lord's coming and the ultimate destiny of mankind. In addition to the Eucharistic activities of the great cenobitic communities, liturgies are also celebrated in the sketes and hermitages of the Holy Mountain as often as possible.

Father Daniel, the great hesychast of St. Peter the Athonite's cave, was a "liturgical spirit" and a "flaming fire," as is spoken of in Psalm 104: "He makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flaming fire." He served the Divine Liturgy daily. His liturgies were indeed mystical, as if heaven had come down to earth, or rather as if earth had ascended up to heaven. Many say that he would celebrate St. Basil's liturgy so that it would last longer. He read all the prayers slowly and with meaning. He was never in a hurry.

If he experienced compunction — a frequent occurrence — he would stop the prayers and cry with tears of joy. For sixty years he did this, every single day. Each liturgy would last for several hours. What blessed moments and times those were, during which souls were lifted up to angelic heights.

There are many holy hieromonks who have this desire to liturgize every day, if at all possible. Such was Father Gideon the Kafsokalyvitan, who would celebrate forty liturgies in a row, almost daily. He had promised to be tonsured a monk when he had come to Mount Athos as a hired hand. When he went back to his village, not having fulfilled his promise, he was suddenly and invisibly slapped on the face. This made him realize what he had done. So he left the vain world and returned to the Holy Mountain to become an ascetic in St. Alcaldes' hut.

The Romanian monk Nectaries, who reposed in peace in 1 890, was most ascetic, sang sweetly like an angel, and was -4 student of music teacher and elder Theophilos.

The famous spiritual father Germanos from Karyes knew the Divine Liturgy by heart. He celebrated the entire service most of the time, absorbed and elevated, with closed eyes.

While in his cell the spiritual father Savvas, called the Chrysostom of the Holy Mountain, resembled a little ball-a poor, round little monk. But when he served the liturgy one could only admire him. As he prayed it, his face gr~ bright, and he resembled an angel.

Father confessor Ilarion the Iberian and his obedient monk Savvas, who left behind the fame of a saint, celebrated the liturgy daily taking turns, in the kathisma of St. Iakovos belonging to Dionysios.

As his subordinate monk Theophylaktos told us, and was confirmed by others, when Archimandrite Ioakim Spetsieris was serving the liturgy he would experience an inner transformation which would be manifested in his face which became bright with grace.

Father Dionysios from St. Anne's would never allow a to go by without a liturgy's being served; even if he's sick, he would get someone else to take his place. If he knew that another priest was sick, without checking what the reason was, he would go to the cemetery church to celebrate the liturgy with great longing and compunction.

Father Dionysios was never angry, nor neglectful of his Jesus Prayer. His obedience was iconography. While working at it, he always kept his thoughts on the life of the saint represented. If the saint was a martyr, his thought would be on the saint's death. If the saint were an ascetic, he would think of his struggles. For every difficult chore, Father Dionysios would be the first to run to do it, thus becoming always a good example to the entire skete.

After St. Neilos' cell, one passes through what is called "Sarran" and then beyond Chairi and, going through a passage of southeast direction, comes to the hermitage of Giannakopoula. In it lived a wonderful spiritual father named Gabriel. He was a celebrant priest until very advanced in age, and he served almost every day. Before and after the Divine Liturgy he did not sleep

on a mattress but rested only on a chair. He would say, "The adversary is waiting to tempt us, so we should not go to sleep right after the liturgy, because we do not want to become polluted and lose the grace given to us in the Holy Mystery." During all of Great Lent he never ate food cooked with oil. Dry bread, olives, onions and lettuce were his ascetic meals.

The ever memorable father Tychon was an ascetic for fifteen years in the most remote desert of Karoulia, feeding only on dry bread. He fell asleep in the kathisma of Stavronikita's holy monastery. Father P. would say of him, "Frequently Father Tychon while serving the Divine Liturgy would be taken in a vision, sometimes lasting for a half hour or more. We kept singing the Cherubic Hymn over and over until he would come to himself and respond. Once I begged him to tell me what was happening to him and he said this:

'My child, my child, my angel takes me where the Cherubim and Seraphim praised God. Then when he brings me back, I come to my senses and realize that I am in the church, serving the liturgy'."

He would not let anyone be in the sanctuary while he was serving the liturgy.

I once met the ever memorable father Matheos from Karakalou, a very simple man who had been ordained by Metropolitan Hierotheos of Militoupolis in 1940 when that hierarch was staying on Mount Athos. From the day of ordination to the day his earthly life ended, or forty- five years altogether, he

celebrated the liturgy daily. He did not like it if he had to miss even one day. Even if he was not the celebrant priest in the katholikon, he would serve a liturgy in one of the little side road chapels. He would read innumerable names during the proskomidi, for the "souls to be benefitted," as he would say. When one of the brothers told him that it was time for him to rest after so many years of serving the liturgy daily, he replied: "I will celebrate the liturgy to my last breath." The amazing thing was that Father Matheos never lost his piety and first enthusiasm, right through the last liturgy that he ever served. When I visited him during the time I was collecting materials for my Profiles of Contemporary Agioritism, he spoke with great respect about his elder, Father Kuthratos.

It was the feast day of Annunciation in 1984 in Kafsokalyvia. After the Divine Liturgy ended, Father Isaias asked me to go with him to his hut to give Holy Communion to Elder Simeon, who was sick. This elder was in his nineties and, though blind, could see God in his heart. We had known Father Simeon and had visited him many times to listen to his words which were like honey. He was also the skete's most ancient pillar. He and his subordinate monk, Isaias, were impoverished. Their small hut was poor and ascetic too, without a garden to grow vegetables, and neither comfortable nor restful. Part of the elder's asceticism was not to wash himself, so his hair fell long to his waist like that of those ancient ascetics who had long, matted hair for countless years.

I accepted the invitation with great joy. I put on my stole, and I held the holy chalice as we proceeded, saying without interruption "Through the prayers of the Holy Fathers. . . ." Ahead of me Father Isaias walked, holding a small lantern to light us through the thick darkness and the treacherous, narrow

paths. It was pouring rain. We were drenched, but it did not seem to matter. I will never forget that procession in the rain, holding the Holy Mysteries and moving in prayer and darkness towards the sanctified skete. Also never to be forgotten was the face of Elder Simeon after we had arrived in the hut's tiny church which was dedicated to St. Simeon the New Theologian, who had praised the divine eros and lived in piety.

I waited on the solea for the subordinate monk to go and bring his elder. "Receive the Body of Christ, taste the Fountain of immortality."

In the trembling light from the oil lamps and the candles burning in front of the Holy Chalice, the blind elder appeared with his hair loose, barefoot, groaning and holding on to the wall and to his subordinate. He came to the chalice and crossed himself. His blind eyes moistened with tears of piety and holy desire.

"Tremble, O man, as you approach the Divine Blood." He communicated, prostrated, crossed himself again, and with great difficulty returned to his cell. Such holy images, portraits, before which even angels would want to bow.

Blessed is the man

Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,

Nor stands in the way of sinners,

Nor sits in the seat of the scornful; But his delight is in the law of the Lord, And in His law he meditates day and night.

(Psalm 1:1-2)

An Agioritan white-bearded elder wrote:

We on Mount Athos ask at every liturgy: 'Please pray for those who are poor, unfortunate, and destitute.' And many hieromonks on Mount Athos listen and pray for the very poor people. And in their sleep those prayed for come to thank them. We have witnessed many miracles when the priests pray for the dead.

Some sick people who have been discouraged by the doctors sent their names to be prayed for at the liturgies and they were immediately cured. And their relatives marvelled at the cure of sometimes hopelessly incurable diseases.

On the Energies of Divine Grace

We once asked an elder, "How can a person receive divine grace?"

"One cannot receive divine grace unless he endures all temptations as they come," he replied and then added: "The greatest obstacle that obstructs God's grace is self-love. When God finds one's heart emptied of all desires, He fills it with His grace, which is impossible to describe. It can only be experienced in one's heart. But even a moment's sinful thoughts can make this grace withdraw. "

An elder said, "People of today do not have God's grace. And if they sometimes have a little bit of it, they cast it away. Then the demons stay with them. Bad thoughts obstruct divine grace. No asceticism is as powerful as good thoughts. Good thoughts come only to those who see everything through cleansed eyes."

A contemporary venerable hesychast would say to me: "Not many people are graced these days. Frequently we remain empty of God's grace. Then through a sorrow or difficulty it comes back to us again."

An elder said, "Many times our prayers are not answered

because of us. Other times it is because of someone else and for a different reason. For example, someone asks me to pray for a person who is ill. I pray, and let's say I have sufficient faith and am not egotistical. Still God does not answer my prayer, because the other person is not humble enough. He may believe that God will help, but his ego stands in the way. We must trust God. We should let Him do whatever He wills. If I pray correctly, I may feel the removal of the temptation, and everything will go well. Any time, however, that God allows us to go through a temptation, it is for our own benefit, and we should probably not ask God to deliver us from that difficulty. If the difficulty is caused by the Devil, then God helps us right away. Many times God's will is unknown to us."

Ail ascetic once was asked: "How is it that many times we don't feel anything when we pray, either in church or privately somewhere else?"

He answered: "There are many possible reasons. Sometimes you may feel deep compunction, or you may sense that the Lord has given you a sweet consolation, though not as a result of your own labour. Then, because you did not understand these things, He takes them away until you understand. There is always a purpose to these things.

"In any case, do not strive for the gift of tears while praying, or for any other spiritual gift, for that matter. The silent suffering within a person for some sin done in the past is the best gift. Forced tears in prayer can be dangerous because they can create illusions about one's spiritual state.

"Tears give rest. A deep sigh many times could be worth— I am not sure, this is only my thought, and I might be wrong—such a deep sigh might be worth more than a basketful of tears.

"We should not ask from God the gift of tears; rather we should

ask Him for repentance, over and over again. We need repentance."

The ever memorable Elder Lazaros the Dionysiatan told us the following incident, which was an experience of his own. He had just been tonsured, and one day as he was reading the salutations of St. John the Forerunner, standing before St. John's awesome icon, he was filled with such grace in his heart. St. John the Baptist said to him, "Go to the chapel of the Holy Unmercenary and be hesychastic. Father Lazaros had indeed just been praying about this very thing, because he had the desire to be a hesychast outside the monastery in a small hut near the forest.



On the Wondrous Interventions of the Mighty Right Hand of Divine Providence

For St. Dionysios of Olympus, God was his total enjoyment, spiritual pleasure, and care during his ascetic struggles in Panagia's garden. Taking no care for his bodily sustenance, he fed only on wild chestnuts. But the all-merciful and all-caring God, to show His endless care and protection toward those who are His friends and servants, allowed the following to happen on a Saturday before the Great Lent.

A monk from the monastery of Zographou came to him and said, "Holy Father, the Great Lent is here. Take this food to comfort your weak body a little bit, and give thanks to God, Who provides abundantly and satisfies the entire world with His love." After he said this, he vanished, in spite of the saint's pleading for him to stay and share the

food with him.

The saint was amazed that the fish brought by the unknown monk was still alive, and the cheese was so fresh that whey was dripping from it, and he praised the all-providing God.-----

The person who originally built the monastery of Docheiariou was St. Euthymios, a friend of our holy father Athanasios of Athos. He had built a church honouring St. Nicholas, and had shed a lot of sweat struggling in the ascetic arena.

The second builder of the monastery was the holy Neophytos, St. Euthymios' nephew. He was the son of a duke at the court of Emperor Nikiphoros Phokas, and he had himself been First Secretary to Emperor John Tsimiskis. His forsaking of this world's honour and glory was admirable,

The holy, grace-filled Theophanis the Docheiaritan proved also to be a miracle-worker. He changed seawater from salty to fresh and the rough seas to calm. He built a monastery near Veria dedicated to the angels, and after his repose he worked many miracles.

Our glorious, blessed Mother and Protector of all, the Lady Theotokos, has continually proven her guardianship and motherly care for her beloved children, the Athonite monks. There are countless proofs of her favours. Once during pirate attacks against the monasteries, the pious hegumen of Vatopedi heard the Holy Theotokos' voice coming from her icon. She told him not to open the gate but to sound the alarm and tell the monks to climb up the fortress walls to repel the enemy.

In the same monastery lived a blessed hierodeacon vimataris' who hid the icon of the Theotokos, called "Vimatarissa," in the monastery's well. It was found, many years after the monk's capture by barbarians, standing upright on the water with a lighted candle beside it.

Genadios, the dochiaris of Vatopedi, lived a holy life according to God's will and was blessed to witness a miracle worked by the Holy Theotokos. He saw a previously empty urn fill up with so much oil that it ran over and underneath the door of the storage room.

It has been said that in Iviron's skete there was a monk who was blind from birth, and whose name was Anthimos. Hearing about the miracles of the Lady Theotokos, the Portaitissa, which she had worked throughout the world, he prayed to her to cure him of his blindness, and he revered the Portaitissa icon so much that he asked an iconographer to paint one for him. In response, the iconographer started preparing to paint the icon. But every time he tried to start the sketch for it, his hand would freeze.

A few days later Father Anthimos, thinking that the icon must be ready, went to get it from the iconographer, who told him that each time he would start to draw, his hands would become numb so that he could not work. When Father Anthimos heard this, he knelt down and, pleading with tears in his eyes, begged the Theotokos to allow the painter to make her holy icon, the Portaitissa, the Holy Mountain's protector.

The all-holy one did not ignore his desire. The icon was finished on a wooden plank without the work of a painter, and then she opened Father Anthimos' eyes so that he might see her all-pure face and that of our Lord Jesus Christ. This event became known throughout the entire world. Father Anthimos saw her with opened eyes, enjoying his vision of her immensely; then his eyes were dimmed again, and he became as before.

In the desert of Kerasia lived two elderly ascetics, Joannis and Theodosios. They were assigned the obedience of carving wooden spoons. They had made so many that they filled two sacks with them, until under Panagia's providence a merchant

from Romania came and bought them all.

On St. George's feast day, the hut of St. George on Karoulia was celebrating its patronal day. The year was somewhere within 1930 to 1935. Approximately twenty to twenty-five I Russian and Greek ascetics were gathered there for the vigil,; but they had no fish for the feast.

Father Zosimas, a most charismatic and simple monk who "• loved his fellow men and was the most charitable of all the \ Russian Athonite ascetics, proposed that they fish from; where they were, since the hut was situated on the edge of a] cliff above the endless abyss of the sea,

"Yes, but how can we fish without a hook or bait?" they others replied.

"Here is a nail, some string, and a piece of bread," said I the elder. They crossed themselves, cast the unusual fishing! rod and, miraculously, caught a large fish with which to make soup. It was a gift donated by the hut's patron saint!

"What are you doing?" he asked. "Is this all the wheat you have? No more?"

The fathers replied that this was all they had indeed, and: that they were unable to buy any more because of the Occupation. It should be noted that 10,000 okas' weight of J wheat were needed a year for the monastery's survival, and they could not buy even one oka of it.

The unknown priest took a few wheat kernels in his hand, 1 blessed them and threw them on top of the rest of the wheat. I He blessed the four points of the horizon, the monastery, and the sea, and then was about to leave.

"Where do you come from?" the fathers asked him. "Stay J to have some bread and olives!"

"I come from very far away—from Lycia's Myra," he said and

departed.

One of the brothers had in the meantime gone for some food to offer their visitor, but the elder who was the monastery's actual protector had vanished. The remaining 150 okas of blessed wheat lasted to the end of the year, that is, from the month of December when St. Nicholas appeared to them, until the following July when the new crop came.

The following marvellous incident occurred thirty years ago in St. Paul's monastery. It confirms Panagia's true presence in all phases and needs of our life. In the monastery there lived a simple old elder with a pure heart, the monk Thomas.

His obedience was to assist in the bakery. Being graced with simplicity and goodness, he was also blessed with marvellous visions.

One day when it happened that the two monks who were in charge of the bakery were absent, the entire responsibility fell upon their helper, Elder Thomas. He had to prepare and bake enough bread for a two-day supply, a huge amount intended for all the fathers and visiting pilgrims.

He did not know what to do. He had no idea where to begin and how. So with tears in his eyes he prayed to Panagia to help him. Then he took some yeast and started adding water and flour. At that moment a glorious lady dressed in black appeared to him. She mixed the ingredients, shaped the loaves, and baked them. Elder Thomas during all this time of preparation felt as if he were not even there.

Shortly after, when he told the fathers what had happened, they realized that this woman was the Theotokos. The bread, in fact, turned out to be very sweet and tasted exceedingly good. "Elder Thomas, you must have put something in the bread to make it bake so fast and taste so good!" they would tell him.

This same care the all-holy Theotokos, our Mother, demonstrated in various ways during the German occupation.

A long while after St. Athanasios of Athos had started constructing the Great Lavra, he faced a great economic difficulty: he had neither the money to pay the craftsmen's wages, nor did he have any food. So he started out for Karyes the Holy Mountain's capital, to find out what he ought to do. After he had walked for two hours, suddenly there appeared before him a glorious lady, who asked him,

"Abba Athanasios, where are you going? Why have you abandoned the project which you have started, a project which pleases God? Go back and finish it!" Astonished, he looked at her with awe and asked,

"Who are you? My lady, how do you know me, and how do you order me to return? With what can I continue the monastery's construction, since no means are left for it?" Then she told him that she was the Mother of God. She ordered him to return, and she promised that she would take care of the money and the food supplies. The saint asked her to give him a sign in confirmation of this.

"Here, hit with your staff this rock," she told him, and immediately fresh water sprang from the rock — which to this day is still flowing.

Saint Athanasios returned to his monastery where he found money, and his storage bins were full of food, even as the Theotokos had promised. With renewed desire and zeal he continued, and soon the monastery was completed, and he gave thanks and glory many times to her blessed name.

The holy Portaitissa icon is known as the greatest miracle-worker on the Holy Mountain.

When the fiery rod was seen reaching from heaven to the sea, it pointed to the place where the icon was found, and the revelation of it was made to an Iviritan hermit, the holy Gabriel, who came down from the mountain and walked on the sea as if

it were dry land. He took up the large icon and the monks placed it with great honour in the sanctuary. But Panagia told the hegumen, "I came here to protect you, not to be protected by you." So the monks repeatedly found her by the monastery's gate after they had placed the icon back in the sanctuary. Since that time the icon has been called "Portaitissa," meaning "of the gate." It is full of grandeur, magnificent in appearance, a depiction worthy of the Mother of God — she who is our awesome protectors', our helper, and our salvation. On the most revered face of Portaitissa there is a scar, the result of its being struck by the sword of a pirate who, when he delivered the blow, saw blood flow from the wound. This miracle affected him so profoundly that he was baptized, tonsured a monk, and remained in the monastery. Although he did not want to be called anything but "Barbarian," he nonetheless lived such a godly life of repentance and asceticism that he was sanctified. There is a frescoed icon of him in the little chapel of Portaitissa. He is dressed as a pirate and has the title of "Saint Barberos."

When our holy father Akakios the Kafsokalyvitan was struggling ascetically in a cave in the unbearably lonely his biographer hieromonk Jonas from Kafsokalyvia, an eyewitness to his life, says that every morning a beautiful bird would come and sit on a tree outside the cave warbling an exquisite melody. As the holy one listened to the bird, he would be filled with an ineffable pleasure' freed him from the boredom and sadness which sometimes attacks hesychasts. Perhaps that bird was an angel fin Lord sent to console him in that inconsolable desert This St. Akakios was blessed with the gift of peacemaking. As soon as anyone tormented by inner thoughts would look upon the holy one's joyful face, he would! peaceful and free of anxiety.

Holy Gregorios, who laboured ascetically near the Lavra during the 13th century, was the spiritual fathers of Gregory Palamas, the great teacher of our Orthodox faith.

That blessed elder of St. Gregory Palamas had so much practised the virtue of possessionlessness and carefree, unceasing prayer, that he was blessed to receive nourishment from an angel of God.

Many years have passed since the marvellous miracle which occurred on the feast day of St. Nicholas in the holy monastery of Gregoriou. The well-known monk Hadjigiorgis the fasting One was at that time the novice Gabriel. The fathers were sad because due to bad weather, they had not been able to fish for food to be offered for the festal dinner. But Gabriel did not despair. His trust and hope was St. Nicholas. He immersed himself in total prayer and supplication. Shortly thereafter, on the eve of the feast, strong waves washed many big, beautiful fish onto the monastery's shore. As soon as the fathers saw them, they ran to gather them up in preparation for dinner, glorifying and singing he praises both of Him Who supplies food and of their protector, St. Nicholas.

The famous spiritual father Ioannis, from the cell of Axion Esti, once told of a new worker who had come to the skete of St. Andrew to make his confession. That worker told him that he had died when he was still a young child. Before he was buried, his mother went to the church and prayed on her knees for a long time, shedding many tears. Then she returned home, put on her good clothes, and lay down near her son who was in his coffin and said to him: "Rise, my child; I will go instead of you." The child was resurrected and the mother died that very moment. Years later that child came to the mountain to be a workman in Karyes.

At one time the ever memorable monk Aglaios from Konstamonitou became very ill and was sent by his hegumen to St. Anthony's Kathisma which had a vineyard. The doctor suggested that monk Aglaios eat meat, since he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was frequently spitting up blood. The sick elder was very sad, for he was unable to serve his monastery as sexton. He prayed continually, begging the Lord fervently to grant him his health. One day while he was praying thus, he suddenly saw a large deer which came before him, bowed its head, and then fell down writhing. Father Aglaios, afraid that it might die, ran quickly to tell the other fathers and the gardener, who was not a monastic. When the gardener saw the poor animal in that state, he slaughtered and cleaned it. The fathers ruled that Father Aglaios should cook a little of the meat each day. They believed that it had been sent as a gift, a blessing, and a medicine for the sick person by our Lord and God who cures our souls and our bodies.

"But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). This commandment of the Lord, which conveys a complete and total trust in Divine Providence, is the ascetic's slogan and living practice.

Elder Cherubim from St. Basil was a carefree ascetic, filled with faith and hope. He was also a little hard of hearing, and one time he was isolated by snow in his impoverished hermitage for over a week without food. One day a stranger with a loaded mule knocked at his door. It was almost night. He asked whether he had time to reach St. Peter's Cave before dark and then to return to St. Paul's Monastery.

Ascetic Cherubim said to him, "My brother, there is so much snow that you won't be able to get to St. Peter's Hermitage even if you had ahead of you a whole day. Stay here tonight and you

can go early tomorrow morning."

The stranger replied, "Geronda, I have brought some food supplies which I would like to sell and then return to my work tonight. If you like, keep them and give me a little money."

"Since you are in a hurry, leave them here in this corner and I will give you the money which was given to me by a pilgrim."

He went to his room while the stranger was unloading the goods, but when he returned he was not there. He had disappeared. Father Cherubim looked outside and called, but there were neither footprints nor animal tracks in the snow. Then he realized that it had all been the visible energies of the invisible Divine Providence, which looks after everything. He entered his little chapel and thanked the Lord. With gratitude he placed food supplies in his small storage space. They lasted him the whole winter.

To me the unworthy it was given to hear of such wonders as the following, about which the previous hegumen of St. Paul's Monastery, Archimandrite Andreas, told a similar story. The poor hermit Ephrem who lived in a humble hut between the deserts of Katounakia and St. Basil. His hut was a cave, covered with a few tin sheets and situated underneath a huge rock. He lived there with untold hardships and deprivation.

One winter it snowed a lot, and poor elder Ephrem had been completely snowed in. His supply of dried bread was exhausted and he was without food and very hungry for several days. One day in front of his cave's door he saw a layman standing with a huge sack on his back.

"Father, with your blessings, I want to go to Kerasia, but since there is so much snow and soon it will be dark, it would be a blessing to leave my sack here and get it tomorrow in the daytime."

Hermit Ephrem, full of surprise, asked the stranger, "did you get here, my brother? As you see, there is no path, but come in."

There is fire here for you to warm yourself. Leave your load here and come back to get it any time you wish."

Nonetheless the stranger pretended that he was in a hurry to return to St. Paul's and disappeared right before the hermit's eyes. Coming to himself that very instant, Father Ephrem saw nothing else before him but the sack. He looked: right and left outside the cave, but he saw no tracks in the snow. He opened up the sack and found in it dry bread and other foods which lasted him until the heavy weather of winter was over. His eyes filled with tears of joy and thanks giving for this real act of Divine Providence, and he glorified God and His wonders.

On the ninth of July of every year the monks who are under obedience to Elder Gerasimos the Hymnographer and to his second-in-command, Hieromonk Dionysios, celebrate splendidly with a vigil the feast day of the holy fathers-' Dionysios the Orator and Mitrophanis. They do this in their cave which has been transformed into a beautiful church. In 1958 a glorious feast was celebrated in honour of these saints, one which proved to be even more splendid than usual because of the miraculous multiplication of the fish which were served to the celebrants at trapeza.

While it was estimated that the amount of fish they had would serve from thirty to forty people, over one hundred arrived for the meal. The cook, Father Damaskinos, became anxious and started praying "Lord have mercy and help me at this hour." He started passing the portions to those who were serving the trapeza, but the pan never grew empty. Forty fifty eighty-one hundred portions. Everybody ate for lunch and dinner, and there were even fish left over for the next day!

The ever memorable monk Meletios the Kariotan at one time experienced the protection and help of Panagia, whose icon

Axion Esti he tended for many years in Protaton's holy church. He was going from Mount Athos to Thasos by boat with two Thasiotans. While they were sailing, the seas became very rough, and he fell overboard. The other two tried to help him climb back into the boat, but it was impossible. They yelled out to him, "Geronda, you see yourself that we cannot do anything." Indeed, as soon as they would try to catch him, the boat would capsize. And in vain he himself kept struggling to get into the boat. At length, exhausted, he cried out from the depths of his heart,

"Panagia, for many years I, your sinful servant, have served you. Hear me this moment, for you see that I am perishing" Instantly he found himself in the boat again. The sea slowly calmed down, and they all reached their destination safely.

Elder Eustratios had no beard, despite the fact that he was thirty years old. After his elder's death in the Holy Trinity Kathisma of St. Paul's, a place of many caves, he went to Kafsokalyvia. There the elder refused to keep him because the fathers did not want anyone without a beard. Eustratios pleaded insistently. That night they had a vigil in honour of Panagia. In the morning, miraculously, some hair appeared on Eustratios' face, for which he gave praise and thanks giving to her. The most astonishing thing, however, was that as] time went by, his beard grew so much that it reached the ground.

In 1864, Chousni Pasha, the governor of Thessaloniki visited Mount Athos. Educated man that he was, he wanted to visit the Protaton. There he saw, among others, the murals of Saints Onouphrios and Peter the Athonite. But he did not believe that their beards were as long as depicted in| the murals, which portrayed them as reaching the ground. The fathers assured him that such a thing is possible, and to j prove it they brought in the long-bearded elder Eustratios. The pasha, marvelling, said in Turkish "afentersin efentiler"—meaning "I beg your pardon,

gentlemen!"

In the year 1750 on the Sunday before Great Lent began! the monk Makarios of St. Anne's grew very ill. He was about to die. His monk in obedience, Father Theoktistos, was, exceptionally devoted subordinate who that year had become also the assistant to the dikaios, the monk in charge of the skete's main church and of the reception of guests. After the liturgy Father Theoktistos was very distressed because he needed to find some fish with which to make soup for his elder's nourishment. He went to the skete' dock, but he did not find any boat there or any fishermen Everything was deserted. The sea was rough. Immediately .he began to pray, falling to his knees right there and pleading with St. Anne, the mother of the Theotokos and they protectress of the skete.

He had hardly finished his prayer when he saw a huge fish playfully flipping about on the waves. He made the sign of the cross in its direction and, wonder of wonders, the fish was thrown on the sand by the next wave. Over-flowing with gratitude and rejoicing, he immediately took it up and ran to the main skete where his elder lay bedridden. He cooked it, fed the elder, who recovered immediately, and with what was left over fed all the monks and pilgrims who happened to be at the skete that day. They said they had never tasted better fish in their lives than this which had been sent by God.

For three years in a row, light appeared every Friday in the t of the Resurrection of the Lord which belongs to Small I Anne's and in which the spiritual father Savvas lived. The ascetics attributed this happening to the fact that Father Savvas had brought the skull of his ever memorable elder, Ilarion the Iviritan, to the hut with him. Elder Ilarion had always honoured each Friday with a total fast.

There was a poor monk in New Skete, Elder Dorotheos, who had never left Mount Athos from the time he was a young child. He made no crafts to sell. He was only able to fish with a small boat. At one time when all his oil was used up, the all-merciful Lord caused a barrel of oil for him to float in from the sea, between New Skete and the docks of St. Paul.

On the day of Pascha in 1935 the hegumen of St. Paul's, Archimandrite Seraphim, and all sixty fathers of the cenobion came out into the courtyard to celebrate the liturgy of the Resurrection. In a joyful mood and full of enthusiasm after the "Christ is risen!" was proclaimed, the hegumen said to one of the simple fathers, "Elder Thomas, go where the relics of the fathers are kept and tell them that Christ is risen."

"Let it be blessed, Geronda," he replied, and without a second thought quickly went to the crypt where the bones were kept. "Fathers, I was sent by the hegumen to say to you 'Christ is risen!'" he cried out in a loud voice.

Then something awesome happened. The bones creaked and jumped. One skull rose up a metre high and answered Father Thomas' proclamation:

"Indeed He is risen!"

There was dead silence after that. The elder rushed back to tell all that he had seen and heard. For the fathers of the monastery that was truly a unique Pascha, and praising the risen Lord and Master of life, they chanted with joy:

Angels are praising your Resurrection in heaven, O Lord! Make us who live on earth to praise you with cleansed hearts!

The ever memorable elder Theodosios, the monastery's late librarian, would often tell the story of this event.

He was always called "Abba," and indeed he was truly a "papa," the elder Isaak the Dionysiatan. In his monastic endeavours of fasting, praying, and struggling humbly, he was loving to

everybody, obedient in all things and to everyone. And everybody loved him.

Once while he was on an obedience in the monastery's metochion in Karyes, his supervisor Father Gelasios, who at that time was their monastery's representative in Karyes, warned him that it was already midday and that since a storm was expected, he was in danger of getting lost on the way back at this hour in winter time. But he replied that it was necessary for him, without any excuses, to return to Dionysiou, which was a five hours' walk from Karyes. So, after prostrating himself, the blessed one departed. When he reached the peak of the mountain at Iviron, a heavy snowfall descended. It was very difficult for him to walk. When he reached the hill called "Bosdoum" at Simonopetra, across from Athos, the snow was knee high, and it had already begun to grow dark. He was threatened by darkness, by snow, and by the wild beasts of the forest.

Turning all his hope toward the Lord and Saviour, the blessed elder said from the depths of his heart, "Lord Jesus Christ my God, through the blessings of my holy elder, please save me at this hour." And immediately he was lifted by divine and invisible power and carried to the gate of his own monastery. It was time for Compline and the doorkeeper was about to close the gate. When he saw Abba Isaak he was surprised and after greeting him reverently asked how he had been able to come in such a storm. The blessed one, being in ecstasy, said that he had come from Karyes.

"But how did you actually get here in this weather?" The abba could not answer, but only looked at the icon of St. John the Forerunner.

The doorkeeper also noticed that there were no footprint in the snow from the direction of Karyes. Finally because the doorkeeper's insistent questions about when he left (Is Athonite capital and how he had arrived at Dionysiou, Abba Isaak was able to tell him and the other fathers what had

occurred : he said that he could remember everything which happened to him for the first half of the journey, but that that, he could remember only asking for God's help his elder's prayers. Then he found himself in front of monastery's entrance.

Lazaros of Dionysiou, a most compunctionate elder, told us many stories. Among them was the following: "From 1943 to 1945 suffered terrible dizzy spells, especially during the morning hours. No medicine would cure me of them. Then during the vigil of Sts. Kosmas and Damion, the 'mercenaries, on November 1 , 1945, I went to the chapel ; mirroring the saints and pleaded with them with all my might to cure me from this torment. The dizziness went away never came back." This same elder mentioned another instance as well:

After I was cured from malaria, I was left with arthritis in my left leg. I suffered severe pain, burning, and varicose veins. In 1954, again on the feast day of the Unmercenary Kosmas and Damian, I was in a terrible state and begged the saints for a cure. The vigil was almost over and the pains trained. During the Divine Liturgy, however, the burning sensation ceased, the pains stopped, and the veins came back to normal. I give thanks and praise to our protectors and healers!

Elder Lazaros composed the following hymn which he would sing in front of these two saints' icon while he was lighting their oil lamp: From the depth of the heart of a poor worshipper, With gratitude I thank you,
O Unmercenary Kosmas and Damianos,
For the cure which you have granted me.

On Various Pious Monks

Venerable and aged Elder Iosaph, known for his hospitality, was an established iconographer and member of the Iosaphites in Karyes. He told us, "I have met many fathers who laboured endlessly to purify their inner world and be saved. Among them

I have known the following;

Elder Charalambros of great restraint, from the Fountain of Life kellion.

Elder Methodios from St. Nicholas' kellion, known for his voluntary exile.

Very simple Elder Simeon the Chanter.

Mild Father Dionysios from the holy kellion of the Entrance of the Theotokos.

Elder Charalambros, the poorest and most simple of all.

Konstamonitan monk Philaretos the lantern-maker, who never left Mount Athos. Elder Arsenios the woodcarver, noted for his silence and piety. Russian monk Lavrentios, frugal and self-restrained.

Elder Dometios, known for fasting.

Father Neophytos the ever-charitable, unceasingly praying all night long. Father Nikodemos the meek and mild, the good shepherd. The Romanian ascetic who had the birds eating out of his hand. Elder Pachomios, one of the Pachomian iconographers, who was a supporter of the Kollyvades and the traditionalists. Monks Averkios and Charalambros, the most charitable elders. The ever memorable monk Ioakim who, whenever I met him, would tell me all about the many virtuous Agioritan fathers. Finally, possessionless Elder Kosmas the silent.

In the Russian monastery of St. Panteleimon lived many hard-working monks:

Elder Serapion, who fed only on bread and water. Elder Sabinas, who for a total of seven years did not sleep on a bed. Elder Dositheos who was always exact in following the rules. Elder Anatolios, blessed with the gift of repentance. Elders Savinos and Seraphim, who had met St. Seraphim of

Sarov.

In the holy skete belonging to the monastery of Xenophontos lived pious fathers like Father Akakios, who had no evil in his heart. He had very little schooling. He would read passages from the Bible to his guests, thus avoiding idle and empty talk. He died in 1927.

Also strict was Elder Chrysogonos who died in 1943.

In a hut suitable for goats lived an ascetic by the name of Elder Euthymios. He had hung in the middle of his hut a sack full of toasted bread which was his daily food.

The simple, century-old elder Gregorios lived on Mount Athos for eighty years. He died not long ago. He was born in 1890 and had come to the skete when he was eighteen. He had met the monk Moraitidis, and he was closely associated with the hermit Avimelech and the discerning Elder Daniel the Katouniotan. His father confessor was Elder Akakios. We frequently enjoyed his unpretentious, childlike and serene company. One time he brought a book by Ilias Miniatis and read to me a chapter on the Elevation of the Holy Cross. As he read, his eyes filled with tears, this aged elder. It was a sight worth seeing. He felt as if he were standing at the foot of the Lord's cross.

In Kafsokalyvia's skete lived many important monastics, some distinguished for their virtues and others for their formal education attained in the world, and some for both—all of which had become part of their Greek Orthodox soul. Among these were Ionas, a disciple of Saint Akakios from Kafsokalyvia, who reposed in 1665; Pelagios, a subordinate of Ionas who slept in the Lord in 1754; Raphael; Neophytos, of Jewish descent, who was a wise teacher; Eugenios . Voulgaris, who was in charge of the Athoniades School on Mount Athos; Theokletos Karatzas the Byzantine, who died in 1777; the long-bearded Methodios

from Byzantium, who reposed in 1811; Philotheos from Ismirne, who reposed in 1789; Monk Petros, who laboured in the Birth of the Theotokos kalyve and died in 1865; the famous Nikodemos the confessor, a subordinate to Arsenios, the great wood-carver who left behind two legendary carvings, The Crucifixion and The Second Coming, for which he spent fifteen years' work to finish; and Pavlos and Panteleimon the spiritual fathers, both of whom were discerning and charismatic, serious and silent, sweet and mild when they had to advise anyone..

Father Germanos Chair tells us the following about the Kafsokalyvitan fathers, whom we respected greatly: They would stand up during all night vigils, resembling steadfast pillars, always keeping their eyes turned to the ground. The church had many such elders. They were all silent. They did not waste time with idle talk. They kept with exactness their spiritual life. The one who shone more than the rest of them with his illuminated life was Elder Auxentios. He resembled a star. He lived in the kellion of the great martyr St. George. He used a clay urn in which to boil wild greens, the only food he had to live on regularly. Sometimes he ate bread also, but nothing else. He lived in the skete for approximately sixty years.

